

LUFTWAFFE COLOURS
Volume Two Section 4



JAGDWAFFE

Eric Mombeek
With David Wadman
& Martin Pegg

**BATTLE OF
BRITAIN**
Phase Four

November 1940 – June 1941



1940

BATTLE OF BRITAIN PHASE FOUR

"By the end of October and beginning of November, we had been bled dry. I would guess that a third of our flying personnel had been lost. Our nerves were shot."

Future Ritterkreuzträger Heinz Lange, in 1940 as a Leutnant with III./JG 54.

"The air battles over the Channel and England were wearing and demanded sacrifices on both sides. The fear of the Channel was often greater than the fear of the enemy. The life jacket, which we wore on these operations, gave us little security since a person floating in the sea would only be a small speck. Likewise, the container of coloured dye formed a yellow patch on the sea but it dispersed too rapidly."

Fw. Emil Clade, 9./JG 27



The Jagdwaffe

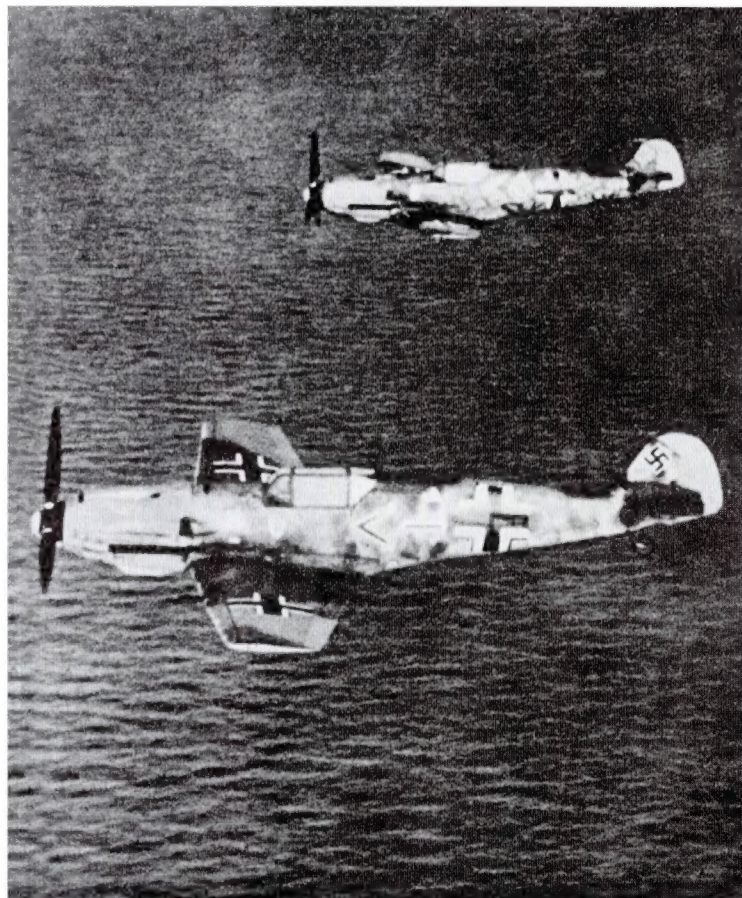
Although from the British viewpoint the Battle of Britain officially ended in late October 1940, the *Luftwaffe* seized every opportunity to attack the British Isles and, indeed, the offensive would continue in various ways for the next three years. Despite its losses during the Summer of 1940, the *Luftwaffe*'s fighter arm nevertheless remained a powerful force well led by experienced pilots, '*alte Hasen*'¹ with a wealth of accumulated knowledge about the enemy, his ruses and his tactics. These pilots were eager to engage the enemy, always flew aggressively and recognised the value of surprise, the tactical importance of height, cloud and sun. They also knew how to use the best qualities of the Bf 109 to exploit the weaknesses and avoid the strengths of their opponents. Violent negative *g* manoeuvres, for example, failed to affect the DB 601 engine due to its fuel injection system, but if a British pilot inverted his aircraft, or suddenly pushed down its nose, the Merlin engine would cut out due to petrol starvation. While always endeavouring to maintain the initiative, to be the attacker rather than the attacked, German pilots knew that if they found a British fighter on their tail the best evasive action was a half-roll and a steep dive which their pursuer was unable to follow. However, *Kurvenkampf* - trying to out-turn a Spitfire - was something only for the most experienced pilots, those for whom real manoeuvring only began once the leading-edge slats had extended. They had no hatred of their opponents and regarded them as fair, but they were highly critical of the tight fighter formations employed by the British, whose tactics seemed more predictable and less advanced than their own.

After the many months of uninterrupted sorties, most *Luftwaffe* pilots had become so familiar with the English countryside that they no longer had any need of their maps. Even over London, pilots quickly learned to recognise such particular features as the distinctive bend in the Thames, while the prominent London churches allowed them easily to locate the different parts of the city. Their maps therefore remained in their aircraft unused except, perhaps, for informing the *Seenotdienst* of the position of a comrade who had crashed in the Channel.

Although the most outstanding German pilots were well ahead of their RAF counterparts in terms of personal scores, the continuous missions, sometimes three or four a day, had resulted in considerable pilot fatigue and almost all units were in need of a rest in order to recuperate from the strenuous Summer and Autumn battles. Pilots were overtired and in 8./JG 54, for example, the *Staffelkapitän* was effected by nervous exhaustion and had to be posted away to rest, while in JG 27, a number of officers are believed to have been particularly badly affected by nerves or stress-related stomach troubles and had to be sent back to Germany or invalided out. Although III./JG 27 claimed 56 victories between July and December, in the same period it lost ten pilots killed in action, four wounded, and eight PoW. In October, 8./JG 27 alone lost two *Staffelkapitäne*, *Oblt.* Günther Deicke and *Oblt.* Anton Pointner, within two weeks of each other, and in December, I. Gruppe was eventually withdrawn completely.

Within the *Zerstörergeschwadern*, too, it was reported that owing to heavy losses, some rear gunner/wireless operators had reached the limit of their endurance. Nevertheless, as in earlier months, the majority of Bf 109 pilots and Bf 110

Bf 109 Es from the Stab of JG 2 over the English Channel. German fighter pilots increasingly came to regard the Straits of Dover as a very formidable barrier, particularly on their return journey, and it worried them even more than the return journey across the North Sea from Scapa Flow had concerned the crews of KG 26 and KG 30 earlier in 1940.



1. A German expression meaning literally Old Hares, but colloquially Old Hands.



LEFT AND BELOW: Two views of Bf 109 E 'White 9' of 7./JG 2, the photograph (BELOW) clearly showing the yellow wingtips and tail areas. (LEFT) Here the same aircraft is having its armament adjusted. For aerial combat, the weapons were normally harmonised so that the guns over the engine converged at 400 metres and the wing guns at 200 metres. For ground-strafting, all weapons were set to converge at 400 metres. Of interest are the various hydraulic jacks and the cradle supporting the tail, the lifting bar pushed through the rear fuselage, and the armourer under the starboard wing changing the ammunition drum for the 20 mm MG/FF cannon. Just visible on the cowl behind the man on the far right is the Staffel emblem.

crews somehow found the fortitude to continue without losing confidence in a German victory, though as the weather gradually deteriorated it became apparent that there would be no early end to the war. Nevertheless, most *Luftwaffe* flying personnel who had seen the massing of Rhine barges felt certain that once the invasion was launched, probably with better weather in the Spring, the end would come in only a matter of weeks. Indeed, some German PoWs in Britain were so confident in victory that they objected very strongly when they were sent to camps in Canada, preferring to remain in Britain where they expected to be released by their invasion forces.

One pilot who remained extremely sceptical about *Seelöwe*, even though he had been told that his *Geschwader* would have the honour of being the first fighter unit to land in England, was the then *Major* Adolf Galland of JG 26. Although given detailed instructions on how to prepare motor vehicles for sea transport and what supplies to take, etc, he personally did not take invasion seriously. A few of his contemporaries also began to realise that all the earlier preparations had, after all, been an elaborate deception.

At the end of October, the *Jagdwaaffe* was still operating a mixture of Bf 109 E-1, E-3 and E-4 aircraft although many of them had been reworked to incorporate the latest modifications. For the *Jabo* role, a number of aircraft had also been modified to carry bomb racks and were designated E-3/B or E-4/B. Also in service was the newly introduced Bf 109 E-7, basically an E-4 manufactured with all necessary bomb equipment already fitted. The Bf 109 E-7 was also equipped to carry a 300 litre drop tank, though it is unclear why these tanks were not used during the Battle. Fw. Otto Junge of 6./JG 52, shot down on 2 November, informed his interrogators that in his unit, the bomb racks had been removed from new Bf 109 E-7s and drop tanks fitted



RIGHT: There were two states of readiness in German fighter units. In the first, known as *Sitzbereitschaft*, the pilot sat in his aircraft with the engine warmed up and could be airborne in 20 to 45 seconds. In the second, known as *Startbereitschaft*, the pilot stood by and could be airborne in three minutes. Orders to take off were received either by telephone to the dispersal point or, in extreme emergency, by a Verey flare pistol using the cartridge of the day. These pilots of JG 27 are standing by at *Startbereitschaft*.



BELOW: This Bf 109 E belonged to 7./JG 54 and displays the Staffel's winged clog emblem on the cowling. The camouflage and markings are unusual in that the aircraft has vertical stripes sprayed on the rear fuselage and the underwing Balkenkreuz is in an early style. Being so much larger than usual, it is distorted by the underwing cannon fairing, yet the fuselage cross is considerably undersize and has narrow proportions.

instead, but while this suggests that drop tanks were available in October 1940, there is little evidence that they were actually used. Whether this was because the tanks leaked and were therefore disliked by the pilots or was due, perhaps, to difficulties in providing an adequate oil supply for extended flights² is not known, but had these auxiliary tanks been available earlier - or used earlier - then the increased endurance of the Bf 109 may well have had a significant impact on the course of the Battle.

Another possibility is that despite the distinct advantages offered by the auxiliary fuel tanks, bombs may have been preferred for purely operational reasons. As we have seen, unacceptably high losses had resulted in the medium bombers switching to night raids, but the *Luftwaffe* High Command still adhered to the traditional view that the most effective aerial action against important military targets was daylight bombing. Therefore, for as long as the weather held, every effort was made to carry out as many Bf 109 fighter-bomber raids as possible. At the same time, the aircraft of Fighter Command would be forced into battle when, it was still envisaged, the German fighter escorts would attack and destroy them. Although the heights at which the *Jabos* and escorts operated certainly favoured the attackers, the concept was flawed. Firstly, not only did the RAF possess more aircraft than the *Luftwaffe* believed to be the case but British fighter strength was also steadily



2. An interesting feature discovered in the wreckage of a crashed Bf 109 E in February was a tap in the cockpit with instructions to pump over extra oil after 1½ hours' flight.



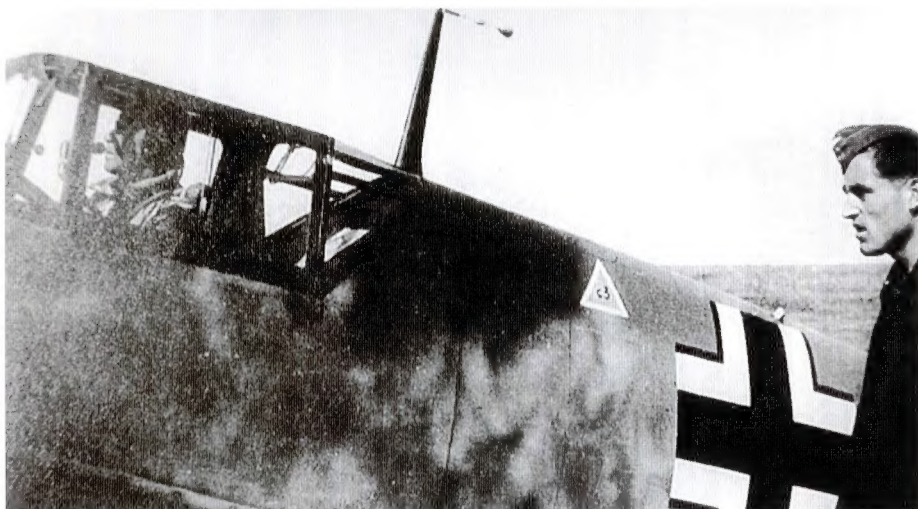
ABOVE AND RIGHT: Why the Jagdwaffe did not employ drop tanks during the latter stages of the Battle of Britain remains something of a mystery and they do not appear to have been in widespread use much before the Balkans campaign of April 1941. This photograph (**ABOVE**) of a Bf 109 E-7 of I./JG 3 and its drop tank is believed to have been taken earlier in 1941 and is therefore unusual. Unusual, too, is the segmented camouflage on the fuselage, which appears to consist of dark green lines and sprayed spots, although variations of this scheme would also begin to appear by the time of the Balkans campaign. Nine victory bars are painted on the rudder but the identity of the pilot is not known. (**RIGHT**) A later view of a flight of Bf 109 E-7s with auxiliary tanks. These aircraft still have their factory codes and are being ferried to JG 52 which, at the time of this photograph, was stationed in Rumania.



BELOW: Two aircraft of I./JG 54 immediately before taking off from Campagne in the Autumn of 1940.



ABOVE: Three Bf 109 Es of III./JG 2 with characteristic yellow cowlings and yellow rudders.



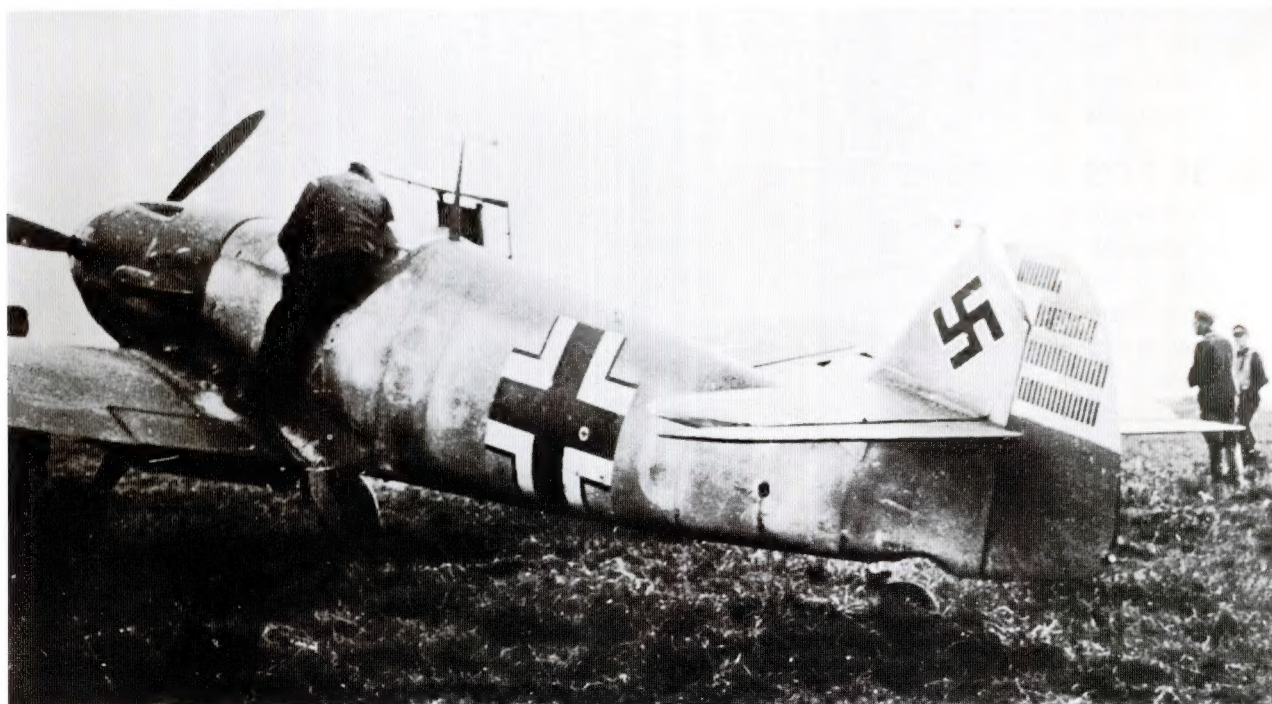
ABOVE: Major Mölders seated in his Bf 109 E-4/N.W.Nr. 3737, shortly before this aircraft was lost. At this time, Mölders had already received a Bf 109 F and this aircraft would eventually be handed down to another pilot. Rather strangely, it retained Mölders' victory tally on the rudder but there is no trace of any Stab markings although the fuselage may, of course, have been re-camouflaged.



ABOVE: Hptm. Hans Asmus of Stab/JG 51 who was flying Mölders' Bf 109 E-4/N.W.Nr. 3737 when it was accidentally struck by a falling bomb and broke up over Kent on 25 October.



LEFT: Final preparations as Major Mölders makes ready for a sortie in his pre-production Bf 109 F-0. The factory call-sign has been removed from the fuselage and the machine is without any Stab markings.



LEFT: Major Mölders' Bf 109 F-1. The rudder shows a total of 54 victories but the fuselage Stab markings have yet to be added over the old code letters SG + GW, still faintly visible on the fuselage.

RIGHT: Oblt. Helmut Kühle, Staffelkapitän of 3./JG 52 from 1 March 1939 to 16 April 1941. In November 1940, German fighter pilots were issued with a one-man dinghy which was worn on the back over the Schwimmweste seen here. However, the dingy was uncomfortable in the aircraft and some pilots who did not like it opted not to wear it, reasoning that by November/December, the sea was so cold that nothing would avail unless the pilot was picked up very quickly, in which case the Schwimmweste would suffice.



growing. Moreover, the Germans believed their night bombing campaign, backed up by daylight *Jabo* raids, was having a significant effect, and although the whole question of *Luftwaffe* strategy was founded on this belief, German perception of the damage done and the effects on public morale were greatly exaggerated.

If the most senior members of the German government and armed forces had a false picture of conditions in England, so at first did the officers and men of the *Luftwaffe*. Gradually, however, there was a growing realisation at all levels of command that attacks had not been as effective as expected and, in the minds of the aircrews, the thought most damaging to morale was that losses had been suffered without any tangible effect. Indeed, when captured *Luftwaffe* airmen were driven through London, those who caught a glimpse of the well-filled shops and saw the number of private motor-cars could hardly believe that this was really the capital they had fought so hard to destroy. They had assumed that at least every window would have been broken, yet only little damage was evident and life seemed to function almost as normal. A further surprise was that a supposedly blockaded and starving country was able to feed its prisoners of war so well.

The Bf 109 F Enters Service

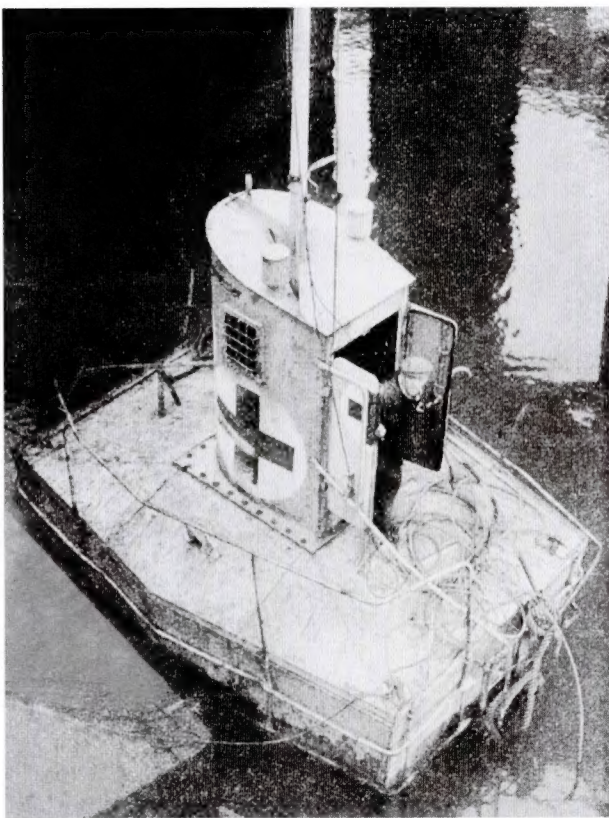
By October 1940, most German fighter pilots were aware that a new fighter, the Bf 109 F, was soon to become available. Although resembling a more streamlined Bf 109 E, internally and externally it was a completely different aircraft with a performance superior to the RAF's Spitfire II. The sole surprise was that the armament was reduced from four to three weapons, but replacing the wing guns with a centrally mounted cannon reduced weight and improved manoeuvrability. The cannon, at first a 20 mm MG FF/M, was positioned between the cylinder banks of the engine and fired through the spinner. In later production models, this was replaced by the faster firing 15 mm MG 151/15 and later by the 20 mm MG 151/20 with increased muzzle velocity.

An early example of the Bf 109 F, a pre-production Bf 109 F-0, was tested by *Obstlt.* Werner Mölders of JG 51 who first flew it in action on 22 October and claimed one victory. On the 25th, Mölders again flew the Bf 109 F, taking off with his usual *Katschmarek*, or wingman, together with *Hptm.* Hans Asmus, who had recently joined the *Stab* of JG 51. Both Mölders' companions were flying Bf 109 Es, *Hptm.* Asmus piloting Mölders' old *W.Nr.* 3737. While flying at about 30,000 ft over Kent, they spotted a formation of some 15 Spitfires flying in the opposite direction 1,500 ft below. The German pilots were making a wide curve in order to attack the British formation from behind when Asmus noticed that the



LEFT: Weighed down with all his flying equipment, this fully kitted out Bf 109 E pilot receives a welcome push.

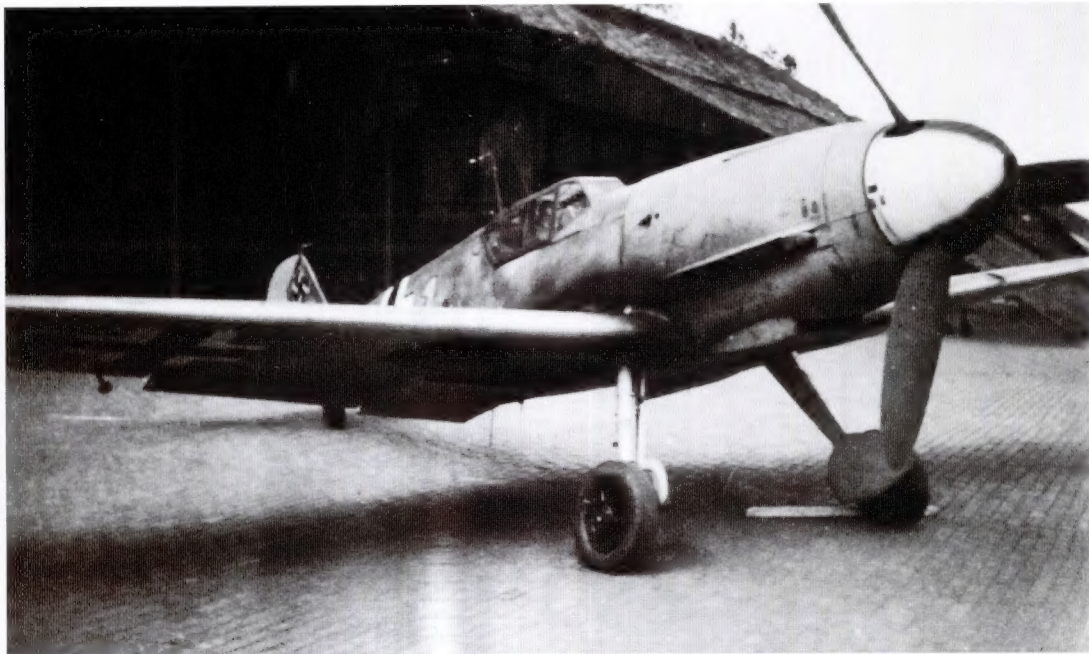
RIGHT: Perhaps owing to the casualties which the aircraft of the Seenotdienst were suffering or the fact that, with the coming of Winter, the Channel would be too rough for seaplanes to operate, rescue buoys were provided as an aid to downed German airmen. In mid-October 1940, II. Fliegerkorps sent a secret telegram to its subordinate units stating that with immediate effect some 50 Rettungsboje, or rescue buoys, would be put in position half way across the Channel. They were to be moored about 12 miles apart and their yellow-painted top surfaces were clearly visible from the air. Inside were four bunks with pillows and blankets, together with a range of signalling devices as well as a supply of food, water and cigarettes. Some considerable thought went into these buoys, board games being provided to while away the time, and although each side of the buoys was clearly marked with a red cross, it was considered prudent to provide a mallet and a supply of wooden pegs for hammering into holes made by machine-gun attacks. This example of a rescue buoy was washed ashore on Britain's south coast and was closely examined. It was 13 ft long, 7 ft 10 ins broad and 8 ft 6 ins deep. On top of the 5 ft x 6 ft high tower, on which was painted 'Rettungsboje General Luftzeugmeister', was an 8 ft mast so that any airman making use of the buoy could hoist a flag to signal that he was in residence. He was then to await a boat which went out every night to pick up any occupants.



squadron they were about to attack was covered by another full squadron of Spitfires flying 2,500 ft higher. With his faster Bf 109 F, Mölders soon left his companions behind, and Asmus found himself alone with an entire Spitfire squadron on his tail. To escape, he dived away and then saw a battle formation of about eight Bf 109 *Jabos* at about 20,000 ft. As flying alone over England was dangerous, Asmus decided to fly the rest of the mission with them and pulled out below the friendly aircraft. Unfortunately, on observing the Spitfires, the *Jabos* jettisoned their bombs, one of which struck Asmus's aircraft and knocked him unconscious. When he came to, he found so little of his aircraft remaining that he merely unfastened his straps and allowed his seat and the few attached fuselage parts to fall away. The next Asmus knew he was in Maidstone General Hospital with suspected skull fracture, concussion and temporary amnesia. Examining the widely scattered wreckage of his aircraft, RAF personnel found the rudder marked with 49 victory bars and first assumed they had captured an ace. However, the *Luftwaffe's* leading pilot, Werner Mölders, had returned safely to France with another two victories to his credit.

The Bf 109 F-0 was followed by the first F-1s which left the factory at the end of November. The question of which front line *Jagdwaaffe* units were to be the first to receive the F-1 series was determined at an *ObdL* meeting in early November 1940 when it was decided to deliver approximately 12 aircraft to one *Staffel* each of JG 2, JG 27 and JG 51. This was later amended, JG 27 being dropped in favour of JG 26 so that the new aircraft would go to those units led by the best known *Jagdwaaffe* commanders at that time, Wick, Galland and Mölders.

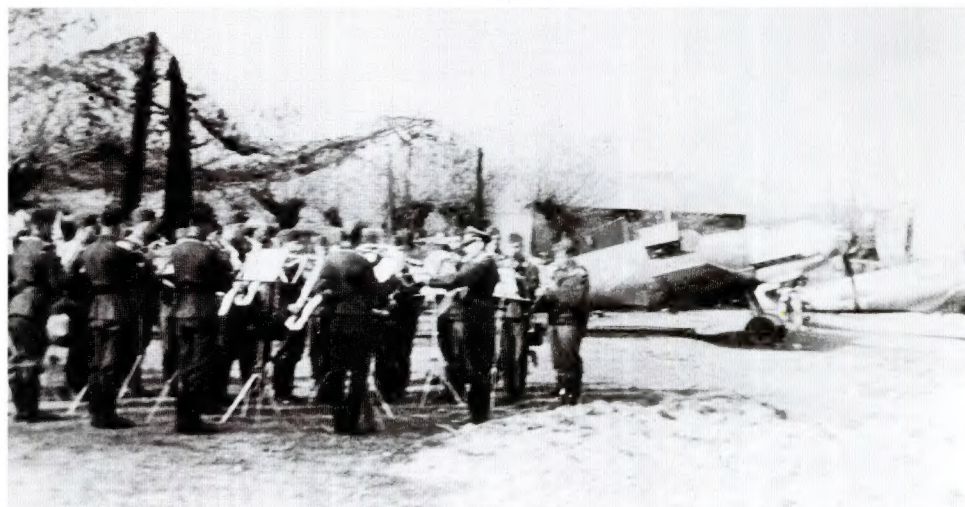
RIGHT: The first production versions of the Bf 109 F-1 and F-2 variants began to reach front-line units in November 1940. This aircraft, 'Yellow 1', has the standard black-green spinner with a one-third white segment and a yellow cowl and rudder. The camouflage seems to have been amended in the field as the area around the Hakenkreuz shows where additional mottling has been applied.



LEFT: Bf 109s of I.(J)/LG 2 at Calais-Marck. The role of the Lehrgeschwader is frequently confused with that of an operational training unit, whereas in fact all pilots were already fully trained, highly experienced and frequently highly decorated. The original task of the Lehrgeschwader was to develop operational tactics and then demonstrate how these tactics should be employed in combat. Thus a Lehrgeschwader may be more accurately described as an Operational Development Wing, but from the beginning of the war operational requirements dictated that these units were retained at the front where they were employed as regular operational units. As a means of identifying their special instructional status, however, personnel serving with the Lehrtruppen der Luftwaffe wore an ornate letter 'L' on the shoulder straps of their uniforms.



RIGHT, BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT: Hptm. Herbert Ihlefeld and fellow officers (*BELOW*) awaiting the arrival of a special guest. A Luftwaffe band (*RIGHT*) welcomes Reichsminister Hans Frank during his visit to I.(J)/LG 2 in the Autumn of 1940. Note the double chevron on the Kommandeur's machine in the background and the Bf 108 liaison aircraft parked far right. Hans Frank was a lawyer and a friend of Hitler and as an early member of the Nazi Party, became Reichs Commissioner for Justice in 1933. In 1939, Frank became governor general of the Generalgouvernement, that part of Poland not incorporated into the Reich, and ran a brutal and repressive regime. He was tried at Nuremberg and hanged on 16 October 1946.



“Herr Hauptmann, we’re flying into the ocean!”

SIEGFRIED BETHKE, I./JG 2

On 17 October 1940, the I./JG 2 ‘*Richthofen*’ was based at Beaumont-le-Roger, about 40 km southwest of Rouen in Normandy. Shortly after noon, we received orders to transfer to Brest for a special mission to be carried out the next day. This surprised us, since we had been expecting a fighter sweep or to escort bombers to the south coast of England. We had flown three months of hard, relentless missions, during which we had suffered extremely high casualties from British fighters, those in the past two weeks being especially nerve-wracking. Flying over the Channel was particularly telling on the nerves and quite a number of comrades had been lost after parachuting or ditching into the Channel, perhaps after only receiving a minor hit in the radiator. Despite the container of yellow dye attached to the life jacket and the one-man dinghy we all carried, the *Seenotdienst* had been unable to find them in the rough seas.

But now we were in a cheerful mood. We had almost perfect weather with just a little haze, and it would be a pleasure to fly the 400 km to Brest. The life jackets we had worn for the last three months could be discarded and we wouldn’t even need our maps. We only had to fly westwards to the coast and there would be Brest. The whole thing was splendid and no one gave a thought to what the next day’s special mission might entail.

Although we had excellent service personnel, our aircraft had recently been worked so hard that, from an establishment of 40 aircraft, the *Gruppe* assembled just 12 Bf 109s. We took off at 16.30 hrs with our *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Helmut Wick, in the lead. Wick had had a meteoric career and, three days earlier, on the 14th, had returned from Germany where he had been presented with the Oak Leaves by the *Führer* himself. That evening, he told us about the meetings and the discussions he’d had with Hitler while they travelled from Berchtesgaden to Berlin in the *Führer*’s special train. The *Führer*, who contrary to rumours ate meat and drank wine, spoke of many things; the U-boat war, aircraft production, and the Italians, who were supposed to have relieved us but lost their way and wrote off half their aircraft in emergency landings. Hitler referred to “Bloodhound Stalin” and said that sooner or later there would be a clash with Russia. England was to be smashed by the *Luftwaffe* alone but the weather conditions were never favourable enough. Next Spring we would have the Bf 109 F and, later, the Fw 190. Meanwhile, *Hptm.* Wick was to be given command of a *Geschwader*, but at just 25 years of age the responsibility concerned him greatly.

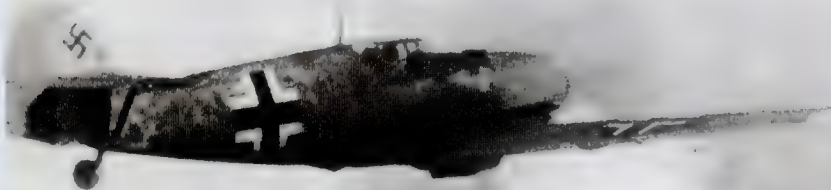
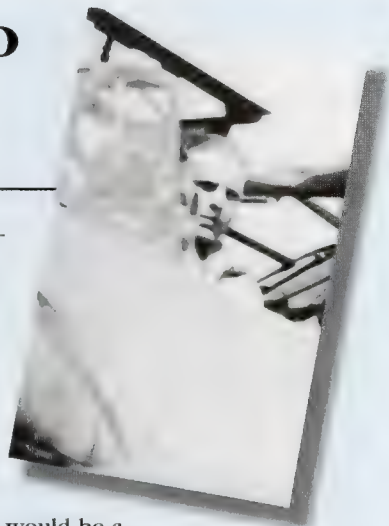
Because of the distance involved, we flew in a long, loose formation. There were no Spitfires or Hurricanes to worry about and with the *Kommandeur* leading, we felt we could relax. For a long time we flew at 1,500 metres with nothing to do but follow Wick and occasionally check our instruments: water, oil temperature, pressures, revolutions, etc. For the old hands this was habitual and automatic. On we flew in complete radio silence. Some pilots in the formation hadn’t even switched on their radios, and I had time to reflect on other matters. Three days earlier I had scored my ninth victory, a Hurricane over Southampton. After my first burst of fire from very close behind, the Hurricane exploded and I had to swerve sharply to avoid the debris. But on the same mission I had lost one of my best pilots, the *Staffel*’s seventh loss since the French campaign in May, and I hoped he was a prisoner and had not come down in the water. Weeks later, however, his naked body was washed ashore on the coast of the Cotentin peninsula. He could only be identified by his teeth.

After the months of operations over England, this flight was a real pleasure, almost like a pre-war Sunday afternoon stroll. Occasionally I checked our course or the position of my *Staffel* in relation to the *Stab* flight. It soon became obvious that orientation over the western part of Normandy was very difficult as there were no prominent landmarks, a situation made worse by the hazy conditions. But we all had complete faith in *Hptm.* Wick, holder of the Oak Leaves and the third-most successful fighter pilot in the *Luftwaffe* after Mölders and Galland.

After half an hour on the same course I began to think that we should have reached Brest and wondered if Wick was taking us south, which would explain why we wouldn’t see the water before we reached our objective. Below, the countryside was confusing. There were no

features which would allow us to orient ourselves, but I expected to see a landmark soon. When a large town, a city with railways, roads, a river and even a small airfield appeared, I wondered where it could be. No sign of the sea anywhere. We had then been flying for about three-quarters of an hour and soon the city disappeared behind us. Damn! We had learned to find our way about over England so we should have found out which city that was.

Then it occurred to me that it might have been Rennes, in which case we were much further south than I thought. Wick must be flying to the south coast of Brittany so we could go sightseeing! Then the coast appeared beneath us and, expecting the *Kommandeur* to alter course, I was ready, waiting to increase speed in order to stay with him as he turned to the right. But I waited in vain. We had been flying for an hour on the same heading, and now there was nothing below but water. Ahead, in the haze, an island appeared. I looked



“I flew right up to his nose and wagged my wings...” Oblt. Siegfried Bethke, *Staffelkapitän* of 2./JG 2 flying his ‘Red 1’. Bethke claimed four victories during the French campaign, his fifth in August and his sixth and seventh in October 1940.

at my map and wondered if this was Belle Ile, and whether Wick would use it as a turning point, but we continued to fly on. Now there was only the sea below us. Where were we going? What was Wick up to? This was completely incomprehensible. We had complete faith in him, of course, especially since his meeting with the *Führer*, but I grew increasingly anxious until the fear of the water and the fixed course caused me to think the unthinkable; perhaps the *Kommandeur* didn't realise where we were.

My eyes moved again to the map on my knee and to the endless water ahead. My mind raced and I realised beyond doubt that we were heading straight out into the Bay of Biscay! Once we reached the point of no return, none of us would regain land even if we did turn around. Fear for myself and my comrades finally overcame all misgivings and I became very calm. I estimated we had fuel left for only another five minutes' flight. Regardless of whether I'd embarrass myself or have to face disciplinary action, something had to be done, and with firm determination I pressed the transmit button on the radio.

"*Amboss from Wanne, Amboss from Wanne*¹. We're flying out to sea. I'm turning round." No reaction. I repeated my message. Again nothing, either from the radio or in the movement of Wick's aircraft. No one had heard. They all had their radios turned off. I opened the throttle to close up with the *Stab* flight, drew alongside the *Kommandeur* and again found the courage to transmit: "*Herr Hauptmann*, we're flying into the ocean! I'm turning back!" At the same time, I rocked my wings twice, right in front of his nose, and then banked tightly to the left and flew in the opposite direction. In order to reach land as soon as possible, I turned exactly through 180 degrees and, once on my new course, I looked around and, seeing that my own *Schwarm* had followed, closed the throttle again. Our lives now depended on saving every drop of fuel. Once we four were together again, I glanced backwards and with enormous relief, saw the others turning steeply to follow us. Already I felt as if a huge weight had lifted from my mind, though I was still by no means certain that we would find anywhere to land, and the responsibility of leading the *Gruppe* to safety was a heavy burden. Belle Ile came into sight again and behind it, land. I made a left turn to fly north along the coast where conditions for an emergency landing were better.

Slowly, for safety and better visibility, I gained height and soon spotted a landing field, but it turned out to have been ploughed up and had wire stretched in every direction to prevent it being used. It had probably been like that since the war with France in May and June. Then, further inland, ahead and to the right, I saw a larger town. This was probably Quimper, but did it have an airfield? I turned towards the town and there was an airfield. It was in good condition, too, with the landing cross perfectly situated and the wind blowing from the west, so we came straight in. Wheels down, flaps down, side-slip to lose height and we're bumping over the grass, first myself and my wingman, then my other pair. We rolled out to the end of the field to make way for the others who were close behind. One actually landed with his engine stopped and two more ran out of fuel as soon as they'd touched down. We'd had a lucky escape. Wick came up to me and thanked me profusely for preventing the flight ending in disaster.

In the event, the mission from Brest was cancelled because of poor weather conditions. The plan had been for our destroyers to attack convoys in the Bristol Channel in order to draw out the Royal Navy, which was then to be attacked by Stukas while we provided protective cover against English fighters. Due to the bad weather we transferred back to Beaumont in pairs, but three pilots had to make emergency landings during which one was injured and another killed. My wingman and myself were flying low - not a wise thing to do considering the terrain in

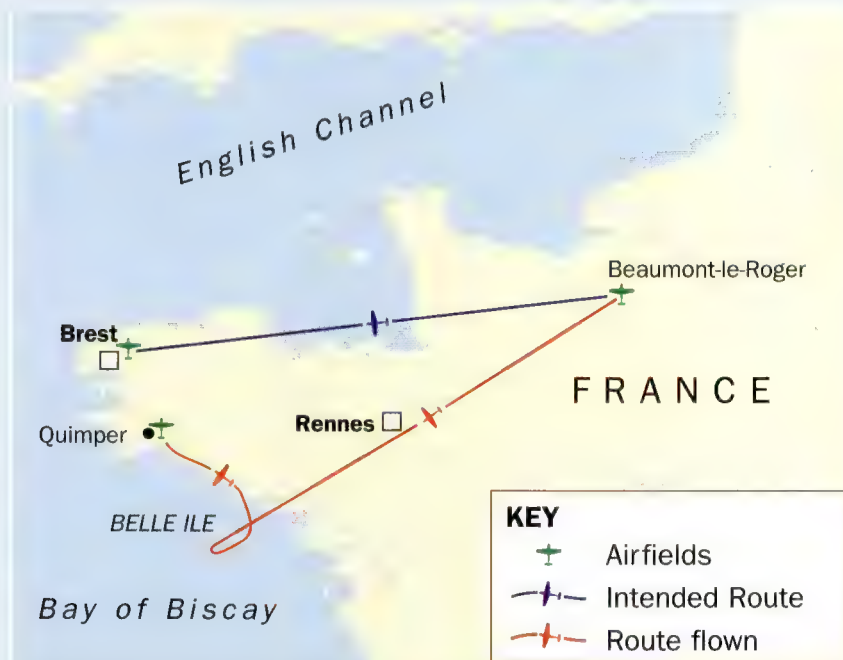
Normandy - and ran into a bank of low cloud. When pulling up, I somehow became disorientated and came out of the cloud almost on my back, righting the aircraft just in time. Another lucky escape.

Wick was unable to explain exactly what had happened but like everyone else, probably believed that with no enemy fighters or weather problems, the flight would just be a routine hour in the air. However, he was exhausted from the recent months of combat and I believe he was so preoccupied with what he had learned while visiting the *Führer*, that he allowed his thoughts to wander. He therefore failed to notice he was a few degrees off course and, not realising we had exceeded our intended flight time, continued to fly onwards while he pondered recent events and, perhaps, what the future held for him. Only two months earlier he had been a mere *Leutnant* but his successes had brought rapid promotion. Now the prospect of taking command of a *Geschwader* worried him and he felt too young for such a responsibility.

Nevertheless, a few days later, Wick was promoted to *Major* and became *Kommodore* of the *Jagdgeschwader 'Richthofen'*. On 29 November, I wrote in my diary, '*Kommodore bit by an Englishman yesterday, baled out near Isle of Wight. Search*

resumed this morning. Heavy sea - found nothing. Hopefully the English picked him up'. But on 7 December I wrote, '*Major Wick definitely missing - not in captivity. Göring has made enquiries in England... Wick is lost.*'

Out of respect for Wick, his exceptional career and his recent decoration by Hitler, we all arrived at an unspoken agreement and no word of our near-fatal flight into the ocean ever trickled out. For myself, I was just satisfied with the outcome of this experience and pleased to receive the heartfelt gratitude of the other pilots.



1. Anvil from Trough.



LEFT: With the approach of Winter, efforts were made to erect more permanent airfield buildings to protect aircraft and maintenance personnel from the weather.

RIGHT: Although representative of an earlier period in the campaign against Britain, this photograph and profile have been included to show the use of the cross-hatch scheme first introduced at the height of the Battle of Britain. In this instance, the undercarriage of this Bf 109 E-3, 'Yellow 5' from 9./JG 54, collapsed while landing after a sortie over England, September 1940.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-3 'Yellow 5' of 9./JG 54

Exhibiting one of the camouflage schemes seen on aircraft of JG 54, the standard 02/71 finish on the spine of this machine has been extended to cover the Blue 65 fuselage sides with a cross-hatch of sprayed straight lines in 71, carefully applied to avoid obscuring the original markings. The wavy III. Gruppe symbol was applied in a style larger than normal.

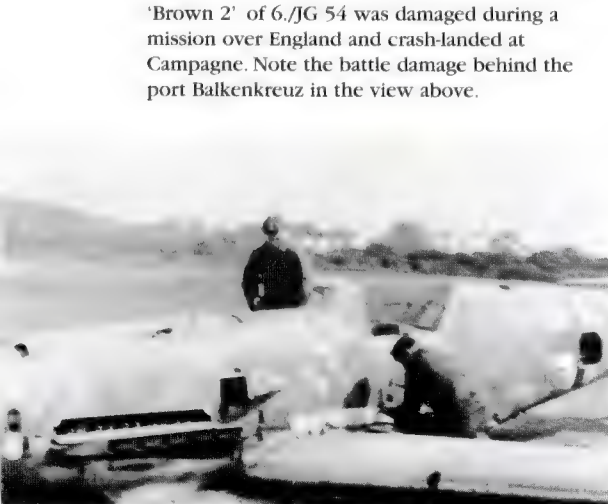


Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1 'Brown 2' of 6./JG 54, Campagne, Autumn 1940

This aircraft displays another camouflage scheme used by JG 54, the machine being finished in a cross-hatch of Green 70, within which are patches of 02 or a similar grey. Note that the gun troughs have been outlined in yellow.



'Brown 2' of 6./JG 54 was damaged during a mission over England and crash-landed at Campagne. Note the battle damage behind the port Balkenkreuz in the view above.



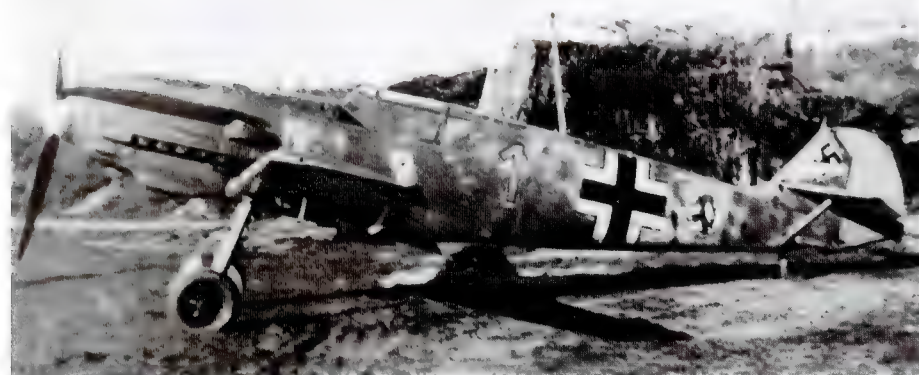
Weeping bird badge of
II./JG 51



Ace of Hearts badge
of 6./JG 51

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-3 'Yellow 1' flown by Oblt. Josef Priller, Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 51, Mardijk, late October 1940

W.Nr. 5057 was finished in a scheme of 02/71 on the fuselage top but with the Blue 65 fuselage sides aft of the canopy almost completely oversprayed with 70/02/71. Tactical markings comprised an orange nose area and a yellow rudder, a not unusual combination, and the emblem on the rear fuselage was applied in such a way that the Blue 65 provided the background to the shield. Note the white radio mast, presumably to aid rapid identification of the Staffelkapitän in the air. The victory tabs on the tail were aligned almost parallel to the ground line rather than the aircraft's central axis.



ABOVE, ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT: At the start of the war, Oblt. Josef Priller was the Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 51 and during the French campaign claimed six air-to-air victories. He remained with this Staffel until 20 November 1940 and is pictured (**ABOVE RIGHT**) with his Bf 109 E-3, W.Nr. 5057, at Mardijk near Calais, on or soon after 19 October 1940. On this date Priller achieved his 20th aerial victory, for which he was awarded the Ritterkreuz, and had previously claimed two aircraft destroyed on the ground. His aircraft, 'Yellow 1', carried the well-known weeping bird badge of II./JG 51 and was marked with all 22 Abschussbalken as well as the Ace of Hearts emblem under the cockpit which Priller first introduced as the 6. Staffel emblem and later adopted as his personal marking. Note that the radio mast has been painted white. The photograph (**RIGHT**) showing the tail of Priller's aircraft in its Splitterbox at Pihen has been reproduced from a contemporary hand-tinted print but is nevertheless believed to be a reasonably accurate representation of the aircraft's colouring and has been used accordingly during the preparation of the accompanying profile. Note, however, that the darker marks on the rudder are shadows from the overhead camouflage and are not mottles.



The Jabo attacks continue

On 1 November, a total of six *Jabo* operations was carried out against London, the first beginning shortly before 09.30 hrs³ when a heavily escorted *Jabo* formation from II.(Schlacht)/LG 2 succeeded in penetrating to the outskirts of the city where bombs were dropped on the East End. None of the attacking aircraft was lost in this encounter and *Hptm.* Wolfgang Lippert, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 27, shot down a Hurricane. That afternoon, groups of fighters on *Jabo* escort or *freie Jagd* missions operated over Kent and areas of the south coast and at 15.00 hrs Ju 87s, making their first appearance since the battles of 18 August, attacked a convoy off the north Kent coast and shipping in the Straits of Dover. Escorted by Bf 109s from JG 26, a series of fierce battles developed around the dive-bombers during which *Hptm.* Walter Adolph, *Obt.* Kurt Ebersberger, *Lt.* Hans Heinemann and the *Kommodore*, Major Adolf Galland all claimed victories.

At the same time, *Luftflotte* 3 sent a formation of four bomb-carrying Bf 110s from ZG 26 to attack Portsmouth. Escorted by 53 Bf 109s from JG 2, the Bf 110s released eight SC 250 bombs over the target area but the results went unobserved due to cloud conditions and all aircraft withdrew without loss. Later, four Bf 110s escorted by more than 50 fighters from JG 2 attacked Portsmouth's electricity generating station. This time a direct hit was observed. The Hurricanes of 145 and 213 Sqns. were scrambled to intercept but 145 Sqn. was still manoeuvring into position when it was 'bounced' by the escort. The *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 2, *Obt.* Hermann Reifferscheidt, dived on the Hurricanes and opened fire on the aircraft flown by Belgian P/O Jean Offenbergh, who saw him too late in his rear-view mirror. As Reifferscheidt broke away under the Hurricane formation, Offenbergh dived after him and fired a burst which caused the Bf 109 to turn away seawards streaming glycol. Still giving chase, Offenbergh saw part of the canopy break away and gave the Messerschmitt three more bursts before losing it in cloud. Reifferscheidt, with his cooling system damaged, was forced to land his 'White 9' near Sidlesham, Sussex where he was captured unhurt. This Bf 109, the only German loss, was Offenbergh's second confirmed victory.

The *Luftwaffe* claimed to have destroyed 13 RAF fighters during the course of the day, five of them by pilots from JG 26. Other successful pilots included *Hptm.* Walter Oesau of III./JG 51 who claimed a Spitfire destroyed, and *Obt.* Viktor Bauer and *Lt.* Helmut Mertens, both of III./JG 3, who claimed a Spitfire and a Blenheim respectively during the early evening.



ABOVE: A member of the ground staff carries out a radio test on 'Red 8' of 3./Erp.Gr. 210. Note the unusually small size of the fuselage numeral.



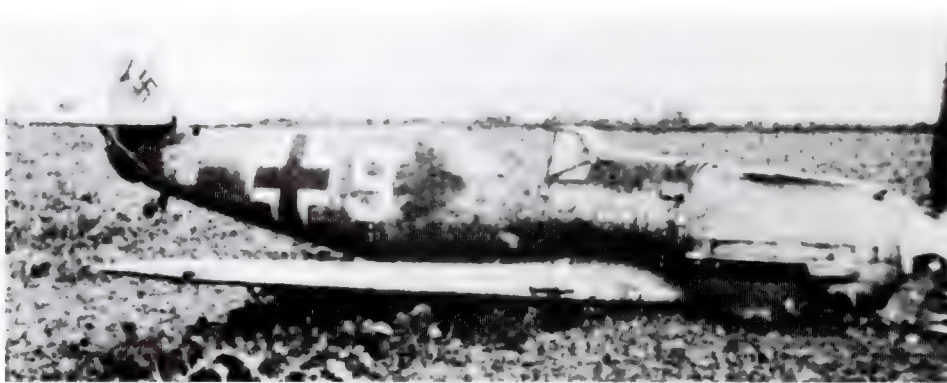
RIGHT: A line-up of 3./Erp.Gr. 210's Bf 109 Es.

3. All times are Continental times.

On the morning of 2 November, two formations of more than 60 *Jabos* and their escorting fighters from II./JG 52 and III./JG 53 set out to attack supply targets located along the River Thames. Some aircraft had taken off without fighter escort and could not reach the target unopposed owing to inadequate cloud cover. When intercepted by four defending RAF Squadrons, the *Jabos* redirected their attacks to other targets or returned without releasing their bombs. Nevertheless, approximately 11 tons of high explosive bombs were dropped on London but four of the attackers were lost including *Hptm.* Wilhelm Ensslen, *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 52, who was killed when his parachute failed to open. Ensslen's *Rottenflieger* *Fw.* Otto Junge was intercepted and attacked from above by Spitfires before reaching the target. The bomber Bf 109s jettisoned their bombs and the formation turned south, but when about 12 miles from the coast, Junge was attacked again and his 'Yellow 4' was hit in the engine. He flew on, hoping to get home, but just beyond the coast his engine caught fire and he ditched in the sea off Dymchurch. Although his dinghy had been punctured, his life jacket kept him afloat until he was picked up by a fishing vessel. *Fw.* Xaver Ray of 8./JG 53 was also captured when the engine of his Bf 109, coded 'Black 6' and with a red spinner and yellow cowling and rudder, failed on the inward flight. He forced landed in a ploughed field near Lower Hardres, in Kent, feeling extremely annoyed that his aircraft, which had developed engine trouble the previous day, had let him down. *Fw.* Ray had previously flown 160 war flights, 40 of them over England, and claimed three victories. The

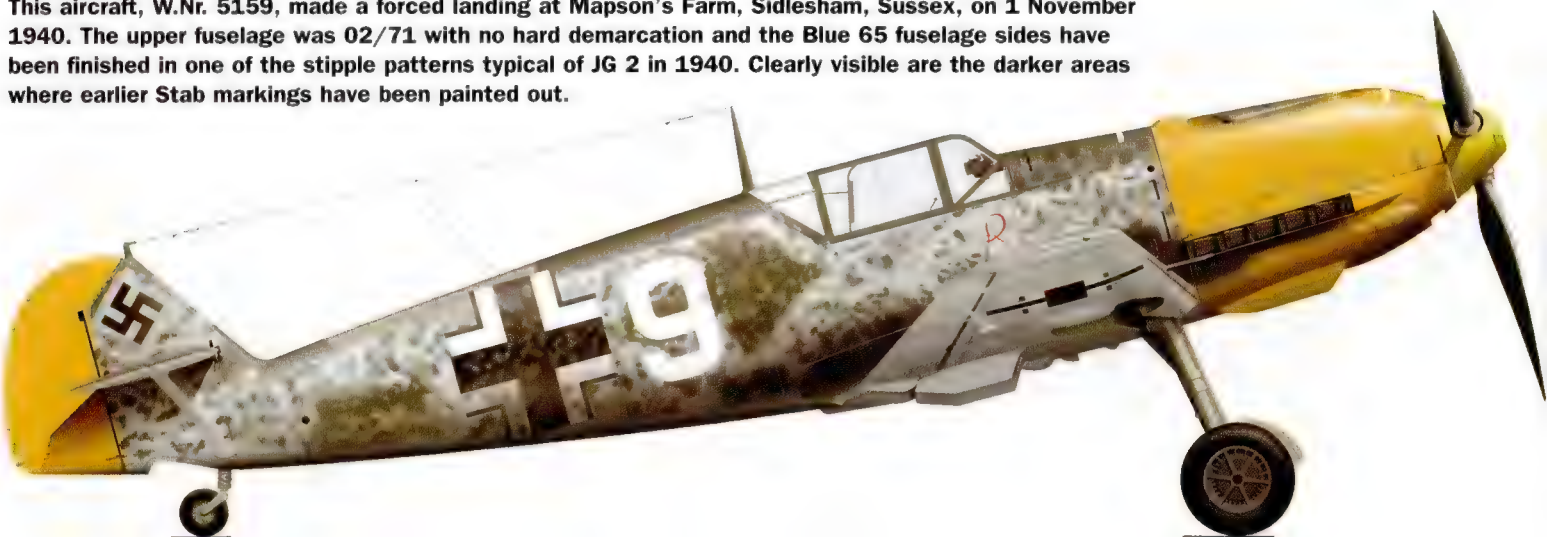


LEFT AND BELOW: Reichsmarschall Göring in conversation with Oblt. Reifferscheidt, second right, the *Staffelkapitän* of I./JG 2. On this occasion, 28 October, Göring awarded Reifferscheidt, who had shot down a Hurricane the previous day, the EK I. However on 1 November Reifferscheidt was himself shot down and became a PoW after his aircraft had been damaged by a 145 Sqn. Hurricane flown by P/O Jean Offenberg. This photograph (**BELOW**) shows Oblt. Reifferscheidt's Bf 109 E-4, W.Nr. 5159, after making a forced landing at Mapson's Farm, Sidlesham, Sussex. The overpainted staff markings suggest that this machine was previously flown by the *Kommodore* of JG 2, Major Wolfgang Schellmann, or perhaps his predecessor, *Obstlt.* Harry von Bülow-Bothkamp. Reifferscheidt was replaced as *Staffelkapitän* of I./JG 2 by Oblt. Anton Mader.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 'White 9' flown by Oblt. Hermann Reifferscheidt, *Staffelkapitän* of I./JG 2, 1 November 1940

This aircraft, W.Nr. 5159, made a forced landing at Mapson's Farm, Sidlesham, Sussex, on 1 November 1940. The upper fuselage was 02/71 with no hard demarcation and the Blue 65 fuselage sides have been finished in one of the stipple patterns typical of JG 2 in 1940. Clearly visible are the darker areas where earlier Stab markings have been painted out.



Experiences of a Prisoner of War

HERMANN REIFFERSCHIEDT, STAFFELKAPITÄN 1./JG 2

I joined the Navy school at Flensburg-Mürvik early in 1935 where I received my basic training. In the Autumn, as a *Fabnenjunker-Unteroffizier*, I was transferred to Berlin-Gatow to attend courses in order to become an officer in the new *Luftwaffe*. My pilot training began on 1 October 1936 in Schleissheim near Munich. In January 1938, I was finally transferred to JG 'Richtbofen' at Berlin-Döberitz where I first flew Heinkel and Arado biplanes before learning to fly the Me 109 'Berta' and 'Dora'. At the end of Autumn 1939, our *Gruppe* was transferred to Frankfurt-Rebstock in order to protect the Franco-German border which we patrolled in small formations. My stay there was short and at the beginning of 1940, I was called back to Berlin in order to take over a *Staffel* at the *Jagdfliegerschule* Berlin-Werneuchen. I remained with this unit until the end of September. On 1 October 1940, I was sent to France as *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 2¹ and during missions over the South of England I claimed my first *Abschuss*, a Spitfire².

On 1 November 1940, my Me 109, 'White 9', was hit and I had to land at Sidlesham, south of Chichester, where I was taken prisoner³. I was eventually sent to PoW (Officers') Transit Camp No. 13, also known as The Hayes, or Swanwick Camp after the nearest village, located about 20 km north of Derby. It was here that I got to know the successful escaper Franz von Werra. He had been transferred here from Grizedale Hall in the Lake District after one of his escape attempts. As soon as he arrived, he immediately began, with the help of several comrades, to build a tunnel. When it was ready, we assembled one evening in the hall and began singing soldiers' songs in order to cover the noises of escape. Posing as a Dutch officer, von Werra reached an RAF airfield and almost succeeded in stealing a Hurricane before he was recaptured.

At the end of January 1941, we were taken to a port in Scotland and put aboard a large passenger ship being used as a troop-transport which was to take us to Canada. Conditions aboard were quite good; once or twice during the day we were allowed to go on deck to have some fresh air. Aboard our ship were some young RAF chaps going to Canada to complete their training and our vessel formed part of a large convoy which also included the Royal Navy battleship HMS *Ramillies* and other warships. The sea journey lasted 14 days and, in order to avoid U-boat attacks, we sailed far to the north and then, in mid-Atlantic, we turned south where some of the ships left us and sailed for Africa with supplies and reinforcements for the British forces there. Our part of the convoy, still with the *Ramillies* as escort, continued safely to Halifax although before we arrived we sailed through a terrible storm which lasted for several days.

In Halifax, we were put aboard two trains bound for the northern coast of Lake Superior. The journey lasted three days, during which time I helped a comrade to remove a plate covering a window. We had to work very carefully to avoid being seen by the guards, but eventually, after hours of work, we were able to open the window. We were not allowed to walk on the train, and there were many guards patrolling with guns and sticks, but we arranged to stand up to screen my comrade from view as he leaped from the train. Unfortunately, he was soon recaptured. I witnessed several other escape attempts⁴ but only von Werra succeeded, mainly I think because he understood and could speak English.

Our first PoW camp, a large square, was situated on the bank of Lake Superior and there was a lot of snow. The following year we were moved to Bowmanville, near Toronto, on Lake Ontario.



Oblt. Hermann Reifferscheidt (third from left) photographed in a PoW camp in Canada, 1941. Others are, l to r: von Minnigerode, possibly ex-III./JG 51; Oblt. Paul Temme, Gruppenadjutant of I./JG 2, shot down 13 August 1940; Reifferscheidt; unknown; Ritterkreuzträger Oblt. Werner Machold, Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 2, shot down 9 June 1941; Lt. Hermann Strasser, of 7./JG 53, shot down 1 September 1940; unknown, and Oblt. Rudolf Möllerfriedrich of 6./JG 2, shot down 18 August 1940.

1 Apparently to replace Oblt. Adolf-Friedrich von Götz, taken PoW on 7 September.

2 This was, in fact, a Hurricane shot down at 17.55 hrs on 27 October 1940.

3 When interrogated, Reifferscheidt refused to discuss anything to do with the war and, when asked what he had done to qualify for the award of the EK I and EK II, replied, "Nothing in particular, just hard work and many war flights."

4 There were many escape attempts. Guards caught most prisoners in the act of leaving the train but another eight escaped at various stages of the journey.

fourth loss was *Oblt.* Friedrich Hoffmann of 7./JG 53 who was killed when his aircraft was shot down off the Kent coast.

The last fighter versus fighter engagement of the day began shortly before 11.00 hrs when four Bf 109s from 4./JG 54 were intercepted high over the Kent coast by patrolling Hurricanes, *Lt.* Otto Grothe being killed when he was shot down into the Channel. Otherwise, *Luftwaffe* activity involved *Jabos* from *Luftflotte* 2 attacking convoys off the south-west coast of England. JG 54 committed 11 aircraft, JG 51 committed 43 and the Bf 109s and Bf 110s of *Erp.Gr.* 210 were also in action although without achieving any evident success. Interestingly, two Hurricanes were claimed by *Oblt.* Hans Philipp and another by a *Feldwebel* from 11./JG 54, and although no Hurricanes were destroyed in combat, two were lost in unrelated accidents.

Bad weather during the daylight hours of 3 and 4 November severely limited activity by both sides, although *Jagdwaaffe* pilots claimed two victories against Blenheims operating over Holland. On the 5th, *Jabos* from *Luftflotte* 2 attempted to carry out two attacks on London, one during the morning and another in the early afternoon, but owing to the strong fighter defences, not all aircraft succeeded in reaching London and a major part of the effort was directed against other targets. During the morning attack, all the aircraft from 9./JG 26, each carrying an SC 250 bomb, were flying over Kent at 13,000 ft when the *Staffelkapitän*, *Lt.* Heinz Ebeling, collided with his *Rottenflieger*, *Uffz.* Walter Braun. Both pilots were able to parachute into captivity while their aircraft crashed near Wittersham. Ironically, in recognition of his 18 victories and the rapid conversion of his *Staffel* to the fighter-bomber role, *Lt.* Ebeling was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on the same day.

Shortly before 14.00 hrs, *Luftflotte* 3 despatched seven Bf 110s of ZG 26, escorted by 53 Bf 109s from JG 2, to attack barracks east of Portland. Due to cloud, the primary target could not be identified and ten SC 250 bombs were released over Portland and Portland Harbour without any results being observed. The escort, however, became involved in a battle with Hurricanes and although only two were lost and two damaged, JG 2 claimed nine British fighters destroyed. *Major* Helmut Wick claimed two

BELOW: *Lt.* Heinz Ebeling, centre, was taken prisoner after a mid-air collision on 5 November 1940 and was promoted to *Oberleutnant* while in captivity. Although he is seen here in a PoW camp in Texas wearing the *Ritterkreuz* and *Frontflugspänge*, he had received neither of these decorations at the time he was shot down and, indeed, the *Frontflugspänge* was not introduced until early 1941. However, in Ebeling's absence, the German authorities later sent both decorations to his mother and it was she who forwarded them to her son in the USA, apparently also with new rank insignia.



ABOVE: *Uffz.* Walter Braun of 9./JG 26 baled out of his 'Yellow 11' on 5 November after colliding with 'Yellow 3', the aircraft flown by his *Staffelkapitän*, *Lt.* Heinz Ebeling. These photographs show British troops examining the remains of Braun's aircraft and (**LEFT**) displaying the bomb rack retrieved from the wreckage.



November 1940

Hurricanes and a Spitfire; *Oblt.* Erich Leie a Hurricane and a Spitfire and *Oblt.* Karl-Heinz Krahle two Hurricanes while *Fw.* Erwin Richey and *Ofw.* Hans Tilly claimed a Spitfire and a Hurricane respectively.

Meanwhile, II./JG 51 was involved in a battle with Spitfires over the Thames Estuary. During this engagement, *Ofw.* Hans Illner of 4. *Staffel* was being pursued by P/O Tony Bartley and dived his 'White 6' at such a speed that upon pulling out the starboard wing was ripped off. Illner baled out and his aircraft crashed at Laindon, Essex. *Oblt.* Franz Jäger, also from II./JG 51, was killed in this action when he was shot down into the sea off Kent. Although JG 51 claimed three Spitfires, none was lost during this encounter.

Later, elements of JG 26 on a *freie Jagd* over north-east Kent fought a running battle between Canterbury and Dover with three of the Duxford based squadrons. Of the British squadrons involved, 310 Sqn. suffered the highest casualties with two Hurricanes lost and three damaged, while 19 Sqn. lost a Spitfire to the *Kommandeur* of I./JG 26, *Hptm.* Rolf Pingel, and 242 Sqn. lost a Hurricane to *Hptm.* Johannes Seifert, also of I./JG 26. In all, JG 26 claimed six British fighters shot down for one Bf 109 damaged and the loss of *Lt.* Erhard Scheidt of 1. *Staffel*. Baling out at extremely low-level, Scheidt, who before the war had lived in the USA, landed in a tree and sustained facial injuries. Subsequently taken for questioning, his first remark when confronted by the interrogation officer was, "When are you going to take this goddamn thorn out of my cheek?"

As the combatants from this battle dispersed, Hurricanes of 253 Sqn. encountered a number of Bf 109s, believed to have been from JG 3, over Folkestone and a small battle developed. There were no British casualties in this action but two Bf 109s were damaged, one of which was eventually abandoned by its pilot near Boulogne-sur-Mer. Thus the day's operations had cost the *Jagdwaaffe* six Bf 109s with four of the pilots taken prisoner, one safe and one killed. A further three aircraft were damaged to varying degrees but all of their pilots escaped injury.

The 6 November remained fairly quiet until the middle of the afternoon when, in concert with a high altitude *freie Jagd* over Kent, six Bf 110s of ZG 26 escorted by 71 Bf 109s from I./JG 27 and JG 2 swept over the Channel bound for Southampton. While the Bf 110s carried out a dive-bombing attack and scored hits in the docks and large buildings, the escorts were engaged above the Isle of Wight by two squadrons of British fighters. Claims were excessive on both sides. JG 2 claimed nine victories, *Major* Helmut Wick claiming two Hurricanes and three Spitfires, *Oblt.* Erich Leie two Hurricanes, while *Lt.* Siegfried Schnell and *Oblt.* Hans 'Assi' Hahn each claimed a Hurricane. In fact, the RAF lost only four fighters. RAF pilots claimed three destroyed and two probably destroyed, but the only loss was *Ofw.* Heinrich Klopp of 5./JG 2 who was killed when his 'Black 1' was shot down into the sea off Ventnor by Sgt. A. McDowell of 602 Sqn.

"I cannot fully explain my next experience. Perhaps I was not quite fit or my nerves were frayed, but after my second Englishman started to go down I was suddenly overwhelmed by the feeling that I had had enough and wanted to fly home. We reformed and then I saw three Spitfires below. I'd seen them before they had seen us. I quickly turned and down one went and then I said to myself, 'Leave the other two alone. You can shoot one down tomorrow. Break off!' But I had to attack and down went the second. By now my cannon ammunition was exhausted and I attacked the third with machine-guns only. Perhaps the pilot was hit for the aircraft went down out of control. The Spitfire turned over and crashed to the ground."

*Major Helmut Wick, Kommodore of JG 2
writing of the afternoon battle of 6 November 1940.*

By this time, the *Luftwaaffe's* fighter pilots had been fighting without a break for more than three months and fatigue from the Summer battles was beginning to have an effect. Similarly, the *Luftwaaffe's* *Jabo* tactics placed an almost intolerable strain on the weary pilots of Fighter Command. These attacks continued throughout November with separate attacks on 25 days of the month as the *Luftwaaffe* despatched as many aircraft as possible to targets in England. Gradually, however, as the weather worsened, large-scale operations began to give way to occasional nuisance raids by much smaller formations and on 7 November, a planned attack on London by *Erp.Gr.* 210 could not be carried out due to icing. Instead, attacks were made against shipping in the Thames Estuary and two more were mounted against convoys in the Portsmouth – Isle of Wight area. In the first, Ju 87s escorted by the fighters of JG 26, JG 51 and JG 53 attacked a small convoy near the Isle of Sheppey, but without sinking any shipping. The only German loss was 'Yellow 1', a Bf 109 E-4 flown by *Ofw.* Wilhelm Müller

of 3./JG 26. Müller's aircraft was hit in the radiator and although he was ordered to crash-land in England, he tried to fly back to France but disappeared without trace. *Erp.Gr.* 210 claimed slightly better success when ten Bf 110s bombed warehouses in Brixton and attacked shipping targets off the coast, claiming a hit on a 5,000 ton vessel which capsized off Harwich. Off Orfordness, a medium-sized freighter was hit in the bows and another freighter off Southend was machine-gunned.

Meanwhile, eight Bf 110s from ZG 26 and eight Ju 87s from II./St.G 2, escorted by 50 of JG 2's Bf 109s, attacked shipping off Portsmouth. They were engaged by 145 Sqn. and a furious battle developed which spread across the Solent and the Isle of Wight before the formation and its escorts broke away towards France. After a short lull in activity, at about 16.00 hrs a second formation of 12 Bf 110s from ZG 26 escorted by 38 Bf 109s from JG 2 and JG 27 took off to attack a convoy reported to be sailing off the Isle of Wight. However, no convoy was found and the aircraft released their bombs over the island before returning to France. No *Luftwaffe* casualties resulted from either of these battles, but pilots from JG 2 claimed seven Hurricanes and *Hptm.* Heinz Bretnütz of III./JG 53 claimed a Spitfire.

On 8 November, small *freie Jagd* sweeps were carried out by Bf 109s, and isolated incursions were mounted against London by *Jabo* formations. Shipping in the Thames Estuary again received attention in the form of two attacks by Ju 87s. The fighter versus fighter combats of the day began over central Kent shortly after 10.30 hrs and continued at intervals throughout the morning. The only *Jagd* *waffe* casualty in these battles was *Fw.* Ortwin Petersen of 6./JG 26 who forced landed his crippled fighter



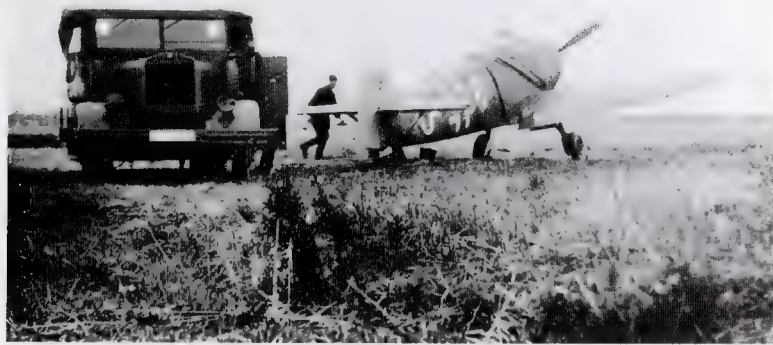
This photograph, taken in early 1940, shows *Fw.* Ortwin Petersen of 6./JG 26 who shot down a Hurricane of 310 Sqn. over Ramsgate on 5 November. Three days later, on the 8th, *Fw.* Petersen was wounded by a Hurricane from 501 Sqn. and crash-landed on a French beach. He was later killed in action on 24 April 1942.

at La Portel after being damaged by a Hurricane. Two RAF fighters were shot down, one possibly by *Ofw.* Willi Roth of 4./JG 26. The activity picked up again shortly after 14.30 hrs when 41 and 222 Sqn. became involved in a running battle with a formation of Bf 109s near Beachy Head and two Spitfires were damaged. At about the same time, some 35 miles to the north, 302 and 501 Sqn. intercepted a JG 26 *freie Jagd* between Croydon and Sevenoaks which resulted in the loss of one Hurricane from each squadron. Shortly after 17.00 hrs, two large formations were plotted approaching the Kent coast and several squadrons were scrambled to intercept. The first formation was engaged by 603 Sqn. which made contact with a large number of Bf 109s off Dover where, in a brief battle, one Spitfire was lost and another damaged. As this battle was being fought,

about 25 Ju 87s bombing coastal shipping near the mouth of the Thames Estuary were attacked by 17 Sqn. which shot down three before the Stukas retired southwards. Meanwhile, 46, 249 and 257 Sqn. attacked the I./JG 51 escorts, the battle finally petering out as the combatants dispersed short of ammunition and fuel. *Oblt.* Georg Claus, *Lt.* Heinz Bär and *Oblt.* Hermann-Friedrich Joppien claimed six victories between them in this action, but only two RAF aircraft were shot down. However, there was a third victim in this late afternoon battle. Only partially involved in the action, 19 Sqn. also suffered a casualty when S/Ldr. B.J. Lane was attacked by what he later described as a Hurricane, leaving him to forced land his damaged Spitfire at Eastchurch. In connection with this incident, it is of interest to note that, at the same time, Fiat G.50s of the *Corpo Aereo Italiano's* 20° *Gruppo* had been in action over eastern Kent and it is possible that it was one of these aircraft which damaged Lane's aircraft.

With persistent low cloud and rain over southern England throughout 8 and 9 November, *Jabo* attacks were again mounted only by aircraft operating singly or in small numbers without fighter protection. There were no fighter engagements of any note, but one Spitfire from No. 1 PRU (Photo-Reconnaissance Unit) failed to return from a mission over Holland on the 9th and was probably shot down by *Oblt.* Franz Eckerle of II./JG 54. The next day remained quiet until shortly after 15.20 hrs when a formation of ten Bf 110s from ZG 26, escorted by 48 Bf 109s of JG 2, crossed the Dorset coast to attack barracks at Lulworth. In the same area, the patrolling Spitfires of 152 Sqn. were surprised from astern by the *Geschwaderstab* of JG 2 and although *Oblt.* Erich Leie and *Ofw.* Kurt Bühligen each claimed a Spitfire in this attack, none was lost and only one was damaged.

In a series of morning fighter sweeps towards London on 11 November, JG 53 was intercepted by two Hurricane squadrons over the Thames Estuary. In the brief battle that followed, *Oblt.* Josef Volk of 9. *Staffel* was separated from the rest of his formation and attacked from behind. He baled out over



A member of the ground staff arrives to prepare 'White 6' of 7./JG 2 for the day's operations.

Wittersham with burns and was taken prisoner. Later that morning, Ju 87s from St.G 1, heavily escorted by elements of JG 3, JG 51, JG 53 and JG 54, attacked a convoy off North Foreland. This raid was intercepted by several RAF squadrons and in a vicious battle over the convoy, two Ju 87s and six Bf 109s were destroyed for the loss of two Hurricanes and their pilots. Only one *Luftwaffe* airman survived, *Gefr.* Helmut Ziehm of III./JG 51 being rescued from the waters of the Channel by the *Seenotdienst*.

Early that afternoon, the CAI attempted its largest operation against Britain when a

formation of BR.20M bombers and CR.42 fighters set out to attack a convoy off Lowestoft while five Cant Z.1007bis bombers with a small escort of G.50 fighters feigned an attack towards Yarmouth. Originally, this operation was to have been supported by an additional 46 G.50 fighters and an unspecified number of Bf 109s, but adverse weather forced these additional fighters to abort, leaving only the CR.42s to escort the bombers. Intercepted by five squadrons of fighters as they approached the Suffolk coast, a drawn out battle developed. However, in spite of high claims by both sides, only three bombers and three of the nimble but outclassed CR.42s were lost in return for two Hurricanes damaged. Of the three CR.42s brought down, *Sergente* (Sergeant) Enzo Panichi of 83^a *Squadriglia* was killed when his fighter crashed into the sea off Harwich. More fortunate were *Sergente* Antonio Lazzari of 85^a *Squadriglia* and Pietro Salvadori of 95^a *Squadriglia* who were captured after forced landing near Lowestoft and Orfordness respectively.

"They might have found better employment defending their fleet at Taranto."

Comment by Winston Churchill on the CAI's activity over Britain on 11 November, the same day the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm successfully attacked the Italian Fleet in Taranto Harbour.

Luftwaffe activity over Britain during the daylight hours of 12 November was confined to a few isolated bomber incursions over the south-eastern counties and there was no fighter engagement of any significance although *Erp.Gr.* 210 resumed its attacks against shipping. This unit, which had now lost no fewer than five *Gruppenkommandeure* and was presently under the command of *Major* Karl-Heinz Lessmann, carried out the first of a new wave of anti-shipping attacks although on this occasion the *Gruppe* failed to find its target and dropped its bombs over Ramsgate Harbour but without much success.

On 13 November, *Luftflotte* 2 sent a total of 40 *Jabos* and 130 escort fighters over England, but a planned attack on London was frustrated by weather conditions and fighters. In the morning, the Bf 109 fighter-bombers of I.(J)/LG 2, diverting to alternate targets because of the weather, attacked fortification lines north of Ramsgate as well as Manston airfield, a large factory and a train before returning without loss. JG 26 was still approaching the target when it was attacked over Kent by the Hurricanes of 249 Sqn, which managed to evade the escort and attack the *Jabos* of 3. *Staffel*. As the *Jabos* jettisoned their bombs over various railway installations, air combat developed and the German aircraft retired eastwards towards

Continued on page 316



An airfield scene showing aircraft of I./JG 51. On 11 November 1940, this *Gruppe* carried out a *freie Jagd* over the Thames Estuary in which I. *Staffel* lost two pilots including the *Kapitän*, Oblt. Georg Claus, an experienced pilot with 18 victories who was killed. Latest research indicates that Claus may have been flying an early Bf 109 F-1, radio code SG + ED. He was replaced by Oblt. Friedrich Eberle.

The *Regia Aeronautica* in the Battle of Britain

On 10 June 1940, exactly one month after the opening of the German offensive in the West, Italy declared war on France and Britain. The following night, RAF Bomber Command launched a raid against the industrial city of Torino in Northern Italy. Although damage was minimal, Benito Mussolini decided that, for reasons of national pride and morale, the *Regia Aeronautica* should take part in the aerial offensive against Great Britain. He therefore asked Hitler to put at his disposal an airfield in France or Belgium from which he could attack England, a request the *Führer* chose to ignore.

Throughout July and August 1940, the Italian Air Force followed with great interest the progress of the *Luftwaffe*'s operations against Britain. The Italian Air Force had been inactive since the conclusion of the French campaign and, hoping to raise home morale and share in the prestige of defeating Britain, Mussolini again asked Hitler if his forces could participate in the air war against Britain. The request, made via the Italian embassy in Berlin, was taken up by Göring himself. Hitler finally agreed on condition that the Italian forces were prevented from acting independently and were controlled and commanded by *Feldmarschall* Albert Kesselring's *Luftflotte 2*.

On 15 August, a day of heavy fighting over Great Britain, Mussolini agreed Hitler's conditions and *Generale* Rino Corso Fougier, who had earlier played an important role in the Italian air campaign against France, was charged with building up the *Corpo Aereo Italiano* (Italian Air Corps, or *CAI*). The *CAI*, consisting of some 200 aircraft drawn from 1^a and 3^a *Squadre Aeree di Milano*, was officially created on 10 September 1940 and included 75 bombers, mainly Fiat BR.20M 'Cigogna', 100 Fiat CR.42 and Fiat G.50 fighters, plus a reconnaissance unit equipped with Cant Z.1007s which would be employed as bombers. A few additional types were included for transport and miscellaneous support tasks.

Several of the *CAI*'s pilots had gained experience during the Spanish Civil War, including *Maggiore* Mario Bonzano who was credited with 15 victories against Republican aircraft, while another well-known pilot was *Capitano* Vittorio Mussolini, one of *Il Duce*'s sons.

On 22 September, 45 Fiat G.50s of 20^o *Gruppo* took off from Campiano for the Belgian airfield of Maldegem, but due to difficulties with the weather and mechanical problems with the bomber elements, no fewer than 28 days passed before the first Italian aircraft reached their destination. Many formations, including one of 18 BR.20Ms, lost their way, dispersed, and landed individually on various German airfields, while many others made emergency landings at various points over the German and Belgian countryside. Eventually, on 19 October, *Sergente* Cavalari's CR.42 coded 85-12 touched down at Maldegem, and although his machine was damaged in the landing, this was the first *CAI* aircraft to arrive in Belgium. On 22 October, with the *CAI*'s protracted arrival in Belgium almost complete and a headquarters established at St. Genesius-Rode near Waterloo, it was placed under the command of *Luftflotte 2*. The *Stormi* were dispersed to surrounding airfields and the technical supply element was based at Evere airfield.

RIGHT: Fiat CR.42s of the 85^a and 95^a Squadriglia, 56^o Stormo, 18^o Gruppo (seconded from 3^o Stormo) at Rhein/Main, Germany, en route to airfields in Belgium. A total of 50 CR.42s were sent for operations against Britain and, once under *Luftwaffe* control, the 18^o Gruppo became known as 18./JG 56.





ABOVE: A Fiat CR.42 of the 85^a Squadriglia on a rain-swept airfield in Belgium. Not all Italian pilots took kindly to being ordered to Belgium, one *Sergente* of 95^a Squadriglia stating that he loathed the climate, was dissatisfied with his officers and couldn't stand either the food or the Germans!

only in night operations, the first being mounted at 20.30 hrs on 24 October when 12 Fiat BR.20Ms, each with eight 100 kg bombs, set out to attack Harwich. One bomber crashed on take-off killing the crew and another made an emergency landing in Northern France. The remaining ten aircraft reached and bombed the target, but only eight managed to find their way back to Melsbroek airfield near Brussels where they were to land, the crews of two aircraft baling out over France and Belgium after becoming lost. Thereafter it was decided that perhaps the *CAI* would be safer carrying out escorted daylight missions.

On 29 October, therefore, 15 bombers set out to attack Ramsgate and Margate, but three turned back due to mechanical problems. The remaining 12 aircraft released 75 bombs on their targets but five bombers were damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

On 11 November, ten BR.20Ms of 43^o *Stormo*, escorted by 40 Fiat CR.42s of 18^o *Gruppo* and 24 G.50s of 20^o *Gruppo*, were ordered to attack Harwich Harbour while a simultaneous attack on Great Yarmouth was carried out by a small detachment of Cant Z.1007s escorted by G.50s. The mission started at noon, but the G.50s were unable to locate the rest of the formation which flew on to Harwich. However, the Italian force had been detected and 46, 257, 249 and 41 Squadrons were scrambled to intercept, although 41 Sqn. was unable to join combat in time. The first Italian loss was due to a technical problem, *Sergente* Pietro Salvadori landing his CR.42 at Orfordness where he was captured unhurt. Less fortunate were his comrades who were first attacked by the Hurricanes of 257 Sqn., led on this occasion by Flt/Lt. Howard Peter Blatchford (replacing the well-known Sqn/Ldr. Robert Stanford Tuck), and then by 46 and 249 Sqn.

The RAF claimed a total of 17 victories: seven by 46 Sqn., eight by 257 Sqn. and two – identified as a Ju 86 P and an He 59 – by 249 Sqn. Two BR.20s made emergency landings in Belgium with wounded crews and two others, unable to reach Melsbroek, landed at Deurne, near Antwerp. Here, a German bomber pilot from II./KG 3 recognised one of the Italian pilots with whom he had spoken a few days earlier when the Italian pilot had proclaimed that the British Spitfires would be easily defeated. Now, the *Luftwaffe* airman found that, as a result of his recent experiences over England, the Italian had greatly altered his views.

The escort also suffered severe losses and only ten of the 40 CR.42s which had taken off returned to Maldegem. Most had experienced fuel problems and many had been severely damaged in emergency landings on the Belgian beaches. That evening, *Maggiore* Feruccio Fosilla, commander of the 18^o *Gruppo* based at Ursel received a telephone call congratulating his unit. Bizarrely, his pilots had claimed nine Hurricanes certainly destroyed and four probably destroyed, though in fact there was not a single RAF loss due to combat with the *CAI*.

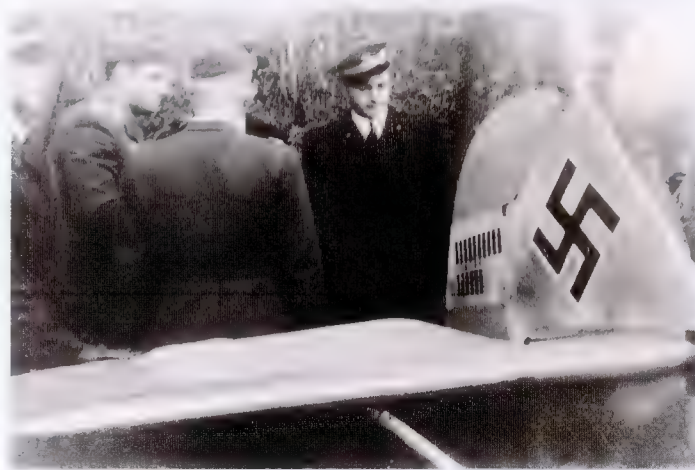
The *CAI* did not recover from these losses and thereafter regularly conducted only small attacks on the English coast or provided escort for the *Luftwaffe*'s Ju 87 dive-bombers. On 21 November, several G.50s were destroyed at Maldegem by a British bomber and, two days later, during a *freie Jagd* involving 29 CR.42s, two fell victim to the Spitfires of 603 Sqn. based at Hornchurch. Again there was some over-claiming, the British pilots reporting eight destroyed, though three Italian airmen returned to Belgium with wounds.

The bombers launched small raids during the nights of 17/18, 20/21, 27/28 and 29/30 November without

The area of operations allocated to the *CAI* covered the Dover-Ramsgate-Harwich region and, to assist in control and communications with *Luftflotte* 2, the *CAI* units were assigned *Luftwaffe* designations: the 13^o *Stormo* became KG 13, 43^o *Stormo* became KG 43, 18^o *Gruppo* became 18./JG 56, 20^o *Gruppo* became 20./JG 56 and the reconnaissance 172^a *Squadriglia* became 1.(F)/172. The arrival of the *CAI* on Belgian soil immediately prompted the government-in-exile in London to declare war on Italy, this being the only such declaration in Belgium's history.

As a result of the *Luftwaffe*'s experiences with the RAF, it was decided that the *CAI* would engage

BELOW: Italian pilots inspecting the 16 victory bars on the tail of the Bf 109 E flown by Hptm. Rolf Pingel, Kommandeur of I./JG 26 based at Audembert. As Hptm. Pingel's 16th kill was achieved on 28 September 1940 and his 17th on 5 November, this photograph was therefore taken soon after the *CAI* arrived in Belgium. Hptm. Pingel was the Liaison Officer between the *Luftwaffe* and *CAI*.



The Fiat BR.20M bomber served with two Stormi Bombardamento operating against Britain in the Winter of 1940-41, the 13° being based at Melsbroek and Chièvres, and the 43° solely at Chièvres. Here, a BR.20M of the 43° Stormo at Chièvres is being towed from its dispersal. The 'M' in the aircraft's designation indicated 'Modificato' (Modified) but in service they were referred to as BR.20bis.



achieving any significant results and lost the crew of one aircraft which fell into the sea during the night of 20/21 November. During December, the Italians launched only a few operations involving small numbers of CR.42s and G.50s which mainly patrolled the Belgian coast.

At that time, the Italian fighter pilots had already begun to hope that they would eventually receive the Bf 109 E. In fact, *Luftflotte 2* did agree to such a proposal and, on 22 November, pilots and mechanics of the 20° *Gruppo* were ordered to prepare to receive the Bf 109 E, two of which were delivered to Maldegem by *Oberst* Werner Mölders' JG 51. Mechanics were sent to Deurne to learn about the DB 601 engine and, from the beginning of December, groups of eight pilots were sent to *Oblt.* Harald Jung's EJG 51 at Cazaux where they were to learn to fly the Bf 109. In the event, no more Bf 109s were delivered and none were flown operationally by pilots of the *CAI*.

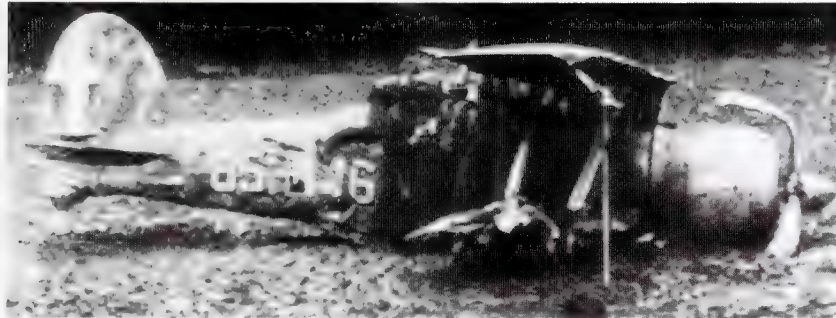
The *CAI*'s last operation took place during the night of 2/3 January 1941 when four Fiat BR.20M aircraft attempted to bomb Ipswich. Soon afterwards, the bombers and then the CR.42s began to leave Belgium. A few weeks later the bombers would be engaged in Greece and Yugoslavia, while the fighters would see action in Libya. Only the G.50s now remained in Belgium and from their bases at Maldegem and Ursel almost daily carried out patrols along the Belgian, French and Dutch coasts against incursions by the RAF, though as far as is known, there was no contact between Italian and British aircraft.

The last *CAI* loss occurred on 13 April when *Tenente* Mario Roncalli, one of the 352^a *Squadriglia*'s most experienced pilots, scrambled from Ursel to intercept enemy aircraft reported in the Flanders area. For reasons unknown, Roncalli aborted the mission and was returning to Ursel when his fighter dived into the ground. Three days later, the last G.50s left Belgium, and also Desvres, in France, where some aircraft had been stationed, and returned to Pisa in Italy. Despite propaganda claims to the contrary, the *CAI*'s naïvely overconfident participation in the Battle of Britain had achieved nothing but had resulted in the loss of 31 aircraft and 35 men.

Similarly, despite claims to the contrary, the bombing carried out by the *CAI* was a failure. This was due to a number of factors, not least of which was the total lack of training which would have allowed the crews to cope with the northern European weather. In addition, their aircraft were inadequate for the type of operations being undertaken and many of the 56° *Stormo* pilots lacked the most basic training for instrument flying in bad weather. Considering also that all the bombers were without blind flying instrumentation, most had had half their armament removed, and only a few of the G.50 fighters were fitted with radios, it is not surprising that the morale of the *CAI* crews was so poor. Had they been trained and equipped with more current aircraft, their contribution to the Battle of Britain may have been more significant.

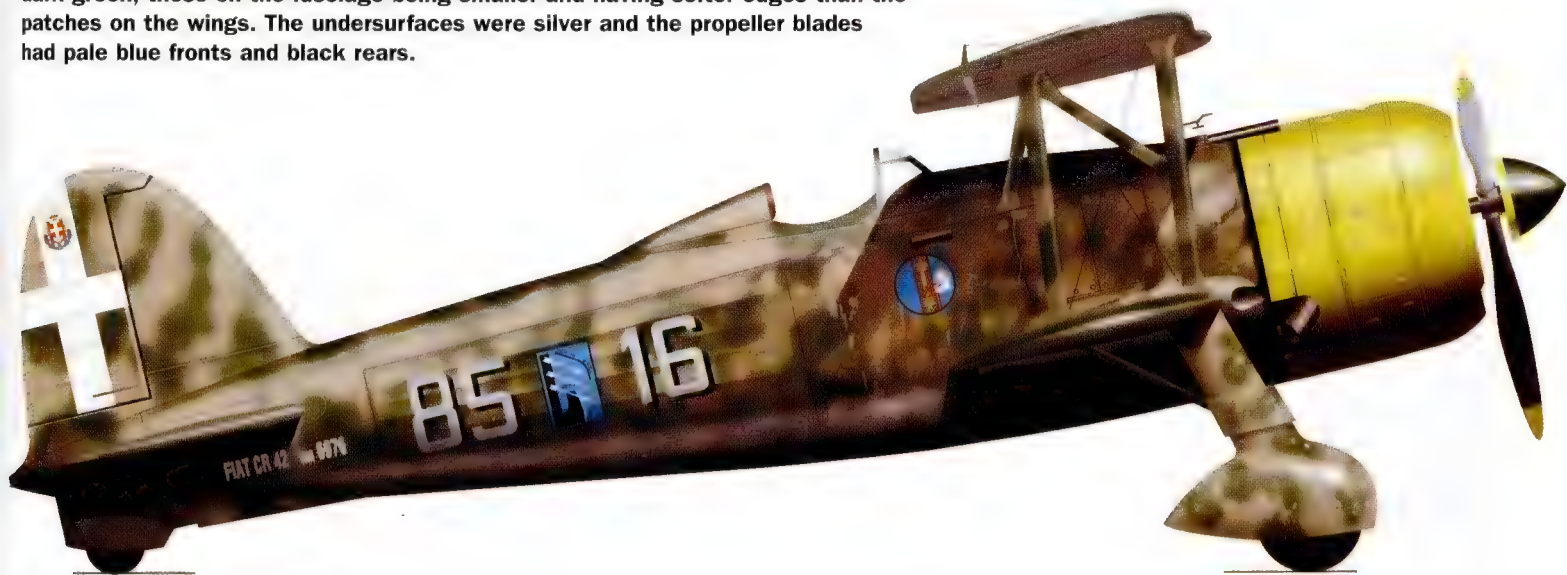
November 1940

RIGHT AND BELOW: On 11 November, 22 CR.42s from 85^a and 95^a Squadriglie, took off from Eeklo to escort ten Fiat BR.20M bombers in the first CAI daylight raid against England (**RIGHT**). Over Suffolk, this 85^a Squadriglia aircraft (**BELOW**) flown by Sergente Antonio Lazzari, became involved in a dogfight with three Hurricanes. He shot at one and saw it dive towards the sea. The fight with the other two Hurricanes continued and Lazzari found that although the Hurricanes were much faster, he could turn more easily and for a while was able to out-maneuvre and evade them. Soon, however, his engine started to vibrate violently. Lazzari thought this due to a jammed variable pitch mechanism, which left one of his propeller blades at a different pitch to the rest, but subsequent investigation by the RAF showed that it had a fractured oil pipe. Realising he could not fly home, he descended to look for a place to land, eventually touching down in a field at Lowestoft. His aircraft ran over a railway line, which wiped off the undercarriage, and crashed into the next field. The pilot himself was unhurt.



Fiat CR.42 of the 85^a Squadriglia, 18^o Gruppo, 56^o Stormo, Corpo Aereo Italiano, based at Eeklo in Belgium and flown on 11 November 1940 by Sergente Antonio Lazzari

This aircraft, Serial No. MM6976 was finished in an uppersurface scheme which was described in the RAF Crash Report as a muddy brown, over which were patches of dark green, those on the fuselage being smaller and having softer edges than the patches on the wings. The undersurfaces were silver and the propeller blades had pale blue fronts and black rears.



LEFT: The 172^a Squadriglia Ricognizione Strategica Terrestre was a reconnaissance unit but operated its Cant Z.1007bis aircraft in the bomber role. The unit was attached to the 43^o Stormo Bombardamento based at Chièvres and operated with that unit's BR.20M aircraft.



LEFT: CR.42, MM6976, coded 95-13, was flown on 11 November by Sergente Pietro Salvadori of the 95^a Squadriglia, 18^o Gruppo, 56^o Stormo. This aircraft was one of 22 escorting BR.20 bombers to England but before combat started an oil pipe broke and this aircraft fell behind the rest of the formation. The engine overheated and Salvadori made a forced landing on the beach at Orfordness, Suffolk. Although the aircraft gently turned up on its nose in shingle, it was practically intact and the pilot was extremely proud of his landing and pleased to be out of the war. Just after landing, a Hurricane came to investigate but in response to Salvadori's frantic waving, the pilot waved back and flew away. Salvadori was taken prisoner and the CR.42 was later despatched to Farnborough for examination.



ABOVE: This CR.42, 95-14, MM5703, from the 95^a Squadriglia, was another aircraft which took part in the mission to England on 11 November. On its return, however, it made an emergency landing on the Belgian coast and overturned. The pilot, Tenente Ramolo Artina was unhurt. The 83^a, 85^a and 95^a Squadriglie formed the 18^o Gruppo which was based at Ursel under the command of Maggiore Ferruccio Vosilla.



LEFT: Lt. Hermann Segatz of 5./JG 51 visiting the 18^o Gruppo at Ursel. JG 51 was the first unit to convert to the Bf 109 F and in December, when this photograph is believed to have been taken, it was thought that the CAI fighter units would convert to JG 51's surplus Bf 109 Es. Lt. Segatz probably visited the Italian unit in order to discuss preparations for the conversion which, in the event, was cancelled. Segatz later had a successful career with JG 5 and became Gruppenkommandeur of II./JG 1.



BELOW: Although based at Maldegem in Belgium since about 20 October 1940, this Fiat G.50 of the 51^o Stormo's 20^o Gruppo was photographed at Den Haag, early 1941. The 20^o Gruppo sent three Squadriglie to Belgium, the 351^a, 352^a and 353^a, these units patrolling the Belgian, French and Dutch coasts against RAF aircraft. This aircraft belonged to the 353^a Squadriglia under the command of Capitano Proveda. On the aircraft's tail is the 51^o Stormo emblem of a black cat catching mice on a white disc. In mid-April 1941, the unit moved to Desvre in France and then returned to Italy. The G.50, also flew with the 353^a Squadriglia based at Maldegem.



LEFT: This group photograph shows Italian pilots of the 20^o Gruppo in front of the Bereitschaft Baracke at Vliissingen, February 1941. The Luftwaffe pilots belonged to 1./JG 1, and the officer wearing the open leather jacket is the Staffelführer, Oblt. Kurt Müller.

November 1940

LEFT: Italian airmen socialising with the crew of a Luftwaffe flak emplacement. In the background is a BR.20M bomber.



ABOVE: Italian ground staff preparing to start the engines of a BR.20M. The ground equipment in the left foreground generated warm air which was ducted into the engine cowlings via the flexible tubing. Note the emblem painted on the bomber's nose.

LEFT: Italian ground personnel loading a BR.20M with bombs and (*BELOW*), waving off another bomber sortie to England. The CAF's first mission was flown on the night of 24 October in order that bombers would be protected by the cover of darkness. However, the raid was not a success due to navigational difficulties and all further raids were flown in daylight with fighter escort.



November 1940



LEFT: During a spell of wet weather in November-December 1940, many airfields in France and Belgium became waterlogged and could not be used. Stab and I./JG 26 remained at Audembert until 7 December when they moved to join the III. Gruppe at Abbeville-Ducat. On the same day, II./JG 26 also moved to Abbeville-Ducat from Marquise. This photograph, taken before the Geschwader's consolidation at Abbeville, shows Obstlt. Galland's aircraft and is believed to have been taken at Audembert, where the effects of the winter rain are obvious.

BELOW: This photograph was taken at Abbeville-Ducat and shows a JG 26 Bf 109 with a plugged spinner being pushed into its pen. Although Abbeville-Ducat was on higher ground, it was still necessary to provide a mat of wooden planking to prevent the machine sinking into the soft surface.



France. Two Hurricanes were slightly damaged, but despite claims for a Hurricane apiece by 3./JG 26's *Hptm.* Johannes Seifert and *Ofw.* Robert Schiffbauer, there were no RAF losses. In the afternoon, III./JG 53 carried out a *freie Jagd* patrol over the southern coast of Kent and was intercepted by 253 and 605 Sqns. While neither side lost any aircraft in this encounter, each RAF squadron claimed one Bf 109 damaged.

Göring takes extended leave

It had now become clear to the *Luftwaffe* High Command that instead of the lightning campaign originally expected, the war against Britain had become one of attrition. By this time Göring was clearly demonstrating a dwindling interest in the continuing air offensive, and on 14 November he handed over temporary command of the *Luftwaffe* to *Generalfeldmarschall* Erhard Milch and departed on leave to his hunting lodge on Rominten Heath in East Prussia.

Following two *freie Jagd* missions over Kent and a brief skirmish, at around 15.00 hrs some 40 Ju 87s escorted by JG 26 and III./JG 51 attacked shipping in the Straits of Dover. Intercepted by five squadrons of RAF fighters, a furious battle developed as the British aircraft fought their way through the escorting fighters to attack the vulnerable Ju 87s. Again overclaiming was high, the RAF believing 16 Ju 87s and two Bf 109s had been destroyed whereas only two Ju 87s and one fighter were lost, the latter being an aircraft of 9./JG 51 flown by *Obt.* Karl-Heinz Schnell, who was rescued by the *Seenotdienst*. Three victories were claimed between *Obstlt.* Adolf Galland, *Obt.* Joachim Müncheberg and *Obt.* Kurt Ruppert, but only one Spitfire had been lost, the pilot escaping injury. Meanwhile, I./JG 51 carried out a diversionary sweep over Kent and was intercepted near Manston by the Hurricanes of 249 Sqn. In the battle which followed, *Fhr.* Erich Vortback's 'White 8' was shot down and the pilot killed while attempting to carry out a forced landing.

At 09.25 hrs on 15 November, a large formation of Bf 109s from JG 26 and JG 53 crossed over North Foreland heading towards London in the first of two major *Jabo* attacks on the city. In the ensuing battle, two Hurricanes were shot down. At about 14.30 hrs, a second raid by elements of JG 26 and JG 54 developed into a running battle over London's eastern approaches and 22 aircraft dropped over five tons of bombs on targets in Silvertown and Woolwich while another 11 aircraft

BELOW: On 14 November, Göring decided to take six weeks' leave and handed over temporary command of the *Luftwaffe* to *Generalfeldmarschall* Erhard Milch. Here, *Obt.* Hans 'Assi' Hahn (left), *Kommandeur* of III./JG 2, Göring (suitably attired in hunting outfit) and *Hptm.* Wolfgang Lippert, *Kommandeur* of II./JG 27 are seen at the *Reichsmarschall's* hunting lodge on Rominten Heath, East Prussia.



were forced to release their bombs over Maidstone. Fw. Robert Schiffbauer, of 3./JG 26, had just dropped his bomb near the East India docks and was leading his *Schwarm* eastwards on the return journey when their escorting fighters were attacked by Hurricanes. One Hurricane, detaching itself from the battle, dived down to attack the rear of the *Schwarm* and Schiffbauer, banking sharply to the left to cover the rear of his formation, was hit fairly badly by fire from this fighter. He attempted to get his damaged aircraft back to France but his engine failed completely and he eventually made a good forced landing on Eastchurch aerodrome. His *Staffel* colleague, Fw. Otto Jaros, was attempting to help another pilot

who was being attacked by fighters when he was attacked from behind by four more fighters and, with his elevators and rudder shot away, abandoned his 'Yellow 9' over the Essex coast. Another loss occurred when 'White 11' of 4./JG 54 was shot down off Shoeburyness killing the pilot, Ofw. Paul Hier.

Meanwhile, at 13.30 hrs, six bomb-carrying Bf 110s, escorted by seven Bf 110s and 18 of I./JG 27's Bf 109s, attacked barracks at Fareham, near Portsmouth, and withdrew without being intercepted. A few hours later, 18 Bf 109s from I./JG 27 and 31 from JG 2 intruded into the Portsmouth area. JG 27 failed to make contact with the enemy but JG 2 became involved in a battle



ABOVE: This photograph, taken in mid-November, shows the three Kommandeure of JG 26 with army comrades. Omitting the army officers and the ladies, the pilots are, from left to right, Hptm. Rolf Pingel, Kommandeur of I. Gruppe, RK on 14 September; Hptm. Gerhard Schöpfel, Kommandeur of III. Gruppe, RK on 11 September and Hptm. Walter Adolph, Kommandeur of II. Gruppe. Walter Adolph was born in Rumania in 1913 but was educated in Germany. He received the Spanish Cross in Gold for service during the Spanish Civil War and at the beginning of the Second World War was the Staffelfkapitän of I./JG 1, which later became 7./JG 27. He received the RK on 13 November 1940.

with Hurricanes and Spitfires in which Uffz. Rudolf Miese of 4./JG 2 was attacked from behind. Two hits in the cockpit jammed the canopy, and the aircraft started to burn. While Miese wrestled with his canopy, he was caught by a full burst from one of the British fighters which set the aircraft fully on fire but freed his canopy. Miese baled out and came down on land where he was captured, badly burned and wounded, while his aircraft crashed into the sea off Felpham, Sussex. Although only one Spitfire was damaged during the course of these battles, three were claimed as destroyed by III./JG 2 pilots. Oblt. 'Assi' Hahn and Oblt. Carl-Hans Röders each claimed a Spitfire destroyed while Ofw. Franz Willinger also claimed to have destroyed a third for the *Geschwader's* 500th victory.

Despite bad weather over most of Britain on 16 November, Bf 109s patrolled the Channel and



RIGHT: Finally realising that the bombardment of London alone would not force Great Britain into submission, Göring decided on another change in policy and, in early November, a new plan was launched. London was to remain the main target with Luftflotten 2 and 3 continuing the night attacks, but the bombing was now extended to include major raids on industrial centres. At the same time, bomber and minelaying aircraft were to attack Britain's most important ports and waterways. By day, the escorted *Jabo* missions were to continue and, since the British had resumed convoy activity, fighter-bomber sorties were to be carried out against Channel and coastal shipping. Here, a convoy carrying food and vital war supplies, without which Britain's war effort could not be maintained, is bombed by a Bf 110 from Erp.Gr. 210.

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: The interrogation reports of several pilots from JG 53 shed some interesting light on the history of the Geschwader's markings. According to these reports, when first formed, the personnel of JG 53 adopted as their badge the Ace of Spades, or card of death, and are believed to have worn uniforms with a distinctive cut to show they belonged to an elite unit (in much the same way as RAF fighter pilots denoted their status by leaving the top button of their tunics unfastened). However, in the Summer of 1940, Reichsmarschall Göring ordered that the special uniforms and the Ace of Spades badge were to be dropped and the Geschwader became known as the Red Ring Geschwader on account of the red circle which was then painted round the engine cowling as seen on the aircraft (*RIGHT, BELOW AND BELOW LEFT*) and the Jabos shown in the colour photographs. Neither the reasons for Göring's order, nor the particular significance of the red ring, are yet fully understood but it was probably intended as a punishment and may also have had some ideological relevance. Throughout September and October, JG 53 was very active, two or more sorties per day being the rule rather than the exception and rest days were only taken when bad weather prevented flying. Whether this hard work had any bearing on the original order suppressing the Geschwader emblem being later rescinded is not known.



carried out *freie Jagd* sweeps over south-east England. Southampton was attacked by Bf 110s, and *Erp.Gr.* 210 struck two convoys near the Thames. A 4,000-6,000 ton steamer was left listing heavily and expected to sink, a 2,000 ton steamer was sunk with a hit amidships and another exploded.

On 17 November, *Luftflotte* 2 mounted 209 sorties during the daylight hours, the first being in the form of a morning *freie Jagd* mounted across the Thames Estuary as a diversion for a raid against Wattisham airfield. The fighters were intercepted and 5./JG 54 lost its *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Roloff von Aspern, and *Ofw.* Wilhelm Donninger. Meanwhile, the Wattisham attack had to be abandoned because of cloud cover and the force of more than 60 aircraft comprising 15 Bf 110s from 1. and 2./*Erp.Gr.* 210 with the entire JG 26 in attendance as escort, headed instead for Harwich. They were intercepted by two Hurricane squadrons, 17 Sqn. attacking the Bf 110s while 257 Sqn. took on the escort. Three of the Bf 110s were shot down by 17 Sqn. which lost a Hurricane, this and another from 257 Sqn. being credited to *Obstlt.* Galland who claimed three. The 1./JG 26 lost its *Staffelkapitän*, *Oblt.* Eberhard Henrici, who was killed when his fighter was shot down into the sea.

In the late afternoon, *Luftflotte* 3 sent 14 Bf 110s from ZG 26 with 60 escorting fighters from JG 2 and JG 27 to attack Newhaven. In the battle that developed, 'Yellow 9' of 1./JG 27 was abandoned by its pilot, *Uffz.* Willi Grotum, after being damaged by two 74 Sqn. Spitfires. Elsewhere, *Gefr.* Richard Riedel of 2./JG 3 unaccountably dived vertically into the ground near Iychurch in Kent. Originally reported as missing, Riedel's body remained entombed in the wreckage of his 'Black 8' until 1974 when the crash site was investigated by a local museum. Following positive identification, his remains were interred with full military honours at the *Soldatenfriedhof* at Cannock Chase.

Poor weather returned to much of Britain between 18 and 22 November and only small-scale attacks during daylight were carried out against shipping by escorted Bf 109s, Bf 110s and Ju 87s. Some attacks were successful while the results of others could not be observed due either to the weather or to the ships' strong defences. During this period, no fighters of either side were lost in combat although there were several accidents and a Heinkel He 111 of KG 53 was destroyed on the 21st after colliding with a 603 Sqn. Spitfire in bad weather over Kent.



LEFT: On 22 November, JG 53's red ring was painted out and the 'Pik-As' emblem reintroduced. Clearly this was considered an occasion of some importance as a PK photographer was despatched to ensure the event was recorded, his photographs showing that the 'Pik As' emblem was applied to the newly painted yellow cowlings with the aid of a stencil. Interestingly, the Hakenkreuz was not re-applied at the same time.



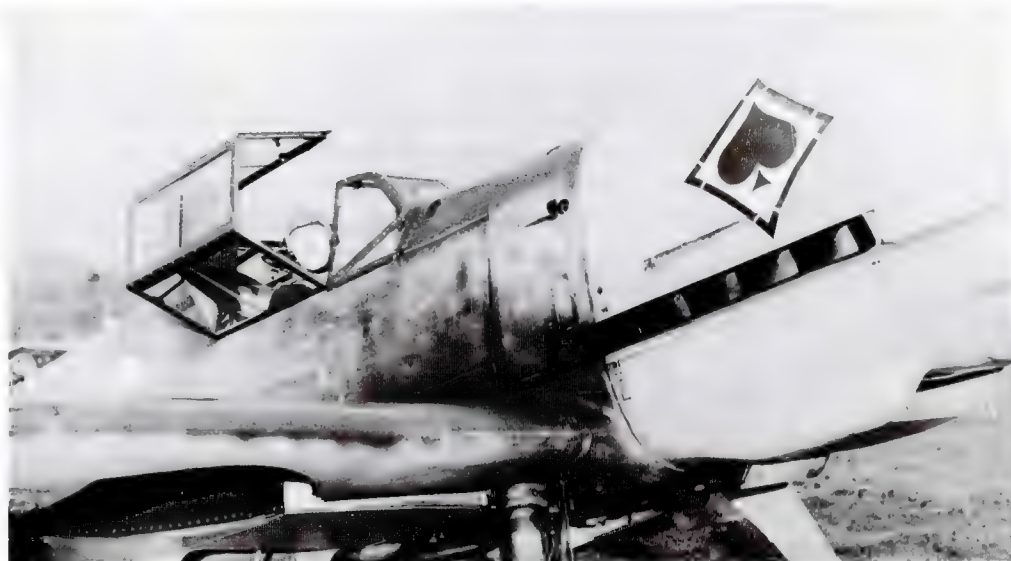
ABOVE: Pilots of JG 53 engage in some horseplay shortly after the reintroduction of their 'Pik As' insignia.



LEFT: Some of JG 53's most successful pilots. From left to right, Lt. Ernst Klager, Oblt. Kurt Brändle, Hptm. Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke, Major Günther von Maltzahn, Hptm. Heinz Bretnütz, Ofw. Stefan Litjens, Hptm. Hans-Heinrich Brustellin, Lt. Erich Schmidt and Oblt. Franz Götz.



RIGHT: Another PK photograph showing some of JG 53's pilots. From left to right, Major Günther von Maltzahn, Hptm. Heinz Bretnütz, Lt. Erich Schmidt and Oblt. Franz Götz.



ABOVE: Fw. Herbert Schramm of 7./JG 53 in front of his 'White 6' in the late Autumn of 1940. During air combat over Dungeness on 17 October, Schramm claimed a Spitfire as his ninth victory but was unable to claim his tenth until the first day of the Russian campaign. Schramm was a very experienced pilot and, pre-war, had been an instructor and a factory pilot.

ABOVE: Another view of Fw. Herbert Schramm's 'White 6' of 7./JG 53 after re-application of the 'Pik As' badge.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 'White 6' flown by Fw. Herbert Schramm of 7./JG 53

This profile shows the aircraft after the engine cowlings had been repainted a bright yellow to cover the unit's earlier red band and after the re-application of JG 53's 'Pik As' badge. In contrast, the rest of the aircraft is quite weathered and worn, with a faded 02/71 uppersurface camouflage. The Blue 65 fuselage side had a light random overspray of 02 and small, heavier patches of 71, while the area from the cowlings to the windscreen and all canopy framing was also 71. The aircraft had no swastika and the Werk Nummer was obscured by a single row of nine victory bars, the first two marked with French roundels and the rest representing RAF aircraft.



LEFT: The pilot of 'White 8' of 7./JG 53 preparing for another sortie. The finish of this machine is almost identical to that on 'White 6'. Note the curved armour plating mounted inside the canopy which, when the canopy was closed, mated with a similar plate inside the fuselage and protected the pilot's back and head during attacks from the rear.

In improving weather on 23 November, *Luftwaffe* fighters were again over south-eastern England and this day saw the largest number of sorties flown in the month, *Jafü* 2 mounting 277 daylight sorties of which 25 were carried out by *Jabos*. In the morning, four *Jabos* set out to bomb London escorted by 29 Bf 109s while another 13 carried out a *freie Jagd* over central Kent. The *Jabos* succeeded in bombing London but as they and their escort turned south, they were attacked by 41 Sqn. *Ogfr.* Günter Loppach of 2./JG 77 had fallen behind the main formation and tried to escape, but his aircraft had already been damaged. With a badly overheated engine and no radio, Loppach lost height and forced landed his smoking 'Black 3' near Iychurch where he tried to set it on fire before being captured. Later, 603 Sqn. was patrolling south of Dover when it intercepted a formation of 29 CR.42s on a fighter sweep along the Kent coast with more than 20 G.50 fighters of the 20° *Gruppo* flying further inland. In the ensuing battle, two of the Italian fighters were shot down into the sea and *Tenente* G. Mazza and *Sergente Maggiore* G. Grillo of the 83^a and 95^a *Squadriglie* respectively were reported missing. As 603 Sqn. broke off the action, 92 and 74 Sqn. arrived in the area and observed fighters some miles south of Dover. These were identified as Bf 109s which avoided combat, but it is believed these aircraft were G.50s from the 20° *Gruppo*, as pilots from this unit reported seeing a formation of British fighters but had not engaged them.

In the afternoon, a mixed formation of 77 Bf 109s escorting 13 *Jabos* to London was intercepted by about 40 fighters. Five of the *Jabos* succeeded in releasing their bombs over London, six diverted to Chatham and two attacked AA positions near Dover. The only loss was Lt. Otto Zauner's 'Grey 12' of 5./JG 53 which made an emergency landing and crashed into trees beside Smeeth railway station where Zauner was captured unhurt.

There was little activity on the 24th until mid-afternoon when several *freie Jagd* sweeps were flown over Kent and the Thames Estuary as a diversion for attacks against shipping off the Essex and Kent coasts. There were no fighter combats and the offensive actions were largely unsuccessful, only two *Jabos* reaching London while nine others attacked without success a convoy of 30-40 merchant ships escorted by four destroyers off Adelsburgh.



On 23 November, 5./JG 53 took off on a mid-afternoon *Jabo* escort mission to London. A large number of Bf 109s took part and, although this aircraft, Lt. Otto Zauner's 'Grey 12', was fitted with an ETC, it was not carrying a bomb. The mixed formation was flying towards London at 19,000 ft when it was attacked from behind by fighters. Lt. Zauner banked to the right to avoid one attacker but another fighter latched onto his tail and damaged his R/T set and radiator. Zauner lost height and although he made a good forced landing at Smeeth, in Kent, the aircraft hit some trees and was damaged. The machine, a Bf 109 E-1 W.Nr. 4010, carried a Gruppe bar aft of the fuselage Balkenkreuz. This aircraft was the first to be examined by the RAF since JG 53 reinstated its ace of spades badge, the familiar 'Pik As' being carried on the nose. Zauner claimed ten victories during the French campaign and had been awarded the EK 1. In this photograph, the aircraft recovery team employ local horse power to remove Zauner's aircraft from its crash site.

Throughout the daylight hours of 26 November, patches of fog and low cloud continued to hamper operations except for a small number of nuisance raids and attacks against shipping in the Thames Estuary and its approaches. An afternoon fighter sweep mounted by IV./JG 51 over central Kent was intercepted by 66 Sqn. resulting in the loss of one Bf 109 when 'White 8' of the 10. *Staffel* was shot down into the Channel south of Hastings killing the pilot, Fw. Adolf Rosen. Meanwhile, in clearer weather further to the north off Harwich, 249 Sqn. were on convoy patrol when they sighted two Bf 109s being fired at by a destroyer, but they escaped before they could be intercepted.



"We saw two Bf 109s above us. They attacked Red Section (I never saw such cheek!) and we all gave chase. I was gaining well on one, about 400 yards dead astern, when some idiot shouted 'Messerschmitts behind. Look out, look out!' ... to cut a long story short, it lost the 109' for me."

*P/O Richard Barclay, 249 Sqn.,
recounting an incident during the activity off Harwich on 26 November.*

Oblt. Gustav Sprick, *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 26 since 8 August 1940, was awarded the RK on 1 October 1940 when he had 20 victories. By 27 November, his score had risen to 23. Sprick grew up on a farm, joined the *Luftwaffe* in 1939 and was particularly popular with his *Staffel* comrades on account of his modesty. Unlike many other successful pilots, he was very reserved about his successes and preferred not to draw attention to himself.

With a considerable improvement in the weather on 27 November, *Jafü* 2 ordered a total of ten fighter missions to provide cover, carry out sweeps, scramble or to search for missing aircraft. The first fighter encounter took place shortly after 09.30 hrs when P/O Keith Lawrence of 421 Flt. on a lone patrol near Walmer was shot down by Oblt. Gustav Sprick, *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 26. Then, shortly after 16.10 hrs, while carrying out a mixed *Jabo* and *freie Jagd* mission across the Straits of Dover and eastern Kent, I./JG 51 was intercepted by three squadrons of RAF fighters and lost six Bf 109s. The 3./JG 51 lost 'Brown 6' which crashed at Crundale, Kent, with such force that the remains of the pilot, probably Uffz. Adolf Benzinger, were never positively identified. Moments later, Gefr. Joachim Hergesell was killed when his 'Brown 2', also of 3. *Staffel*, crashed at Iden Green. Some three minutes later, a third 3. *Staffel* machine, 'Brown 5', forced landed at Monks Horton with a damaged oil system where the pilot, Fw. Wilhelm Erdniss, was taken prisoner. Shortly after this, Flt/Lt. George Christie of 66 Sqn. attacked the Bf 109 E-3 of 2./JG 51's Lt. Wolfgang Teumer over the Thames Estuary. Teumer jettisoned his bomb but his aircraft, 'Black 12', was hit in the radiator and he made a forced landing with his wheels retracted on Manston aerodrome where he was subsequently captured⁴. The remaining two Bf 109s lost by 2./JG 51 on this date, Gefr. Werner Heidorn's 'Black 7' and Uffz. Heinz Dhein's 'Black 6', were shot down over the sea and both pilots killed.

On 28 November, the *Luftwaffe* was again over south-eastern England in some force with the first contact taking place during the morning when patrolling Spitfires had an inconclusive encounter with Bf 109s near Dover. Around noon, a mixed formation of CR.42s, G.50s and Bf 109s flew a *freie Jagd* across eastern and central Kent but were ignored by the defenders. *Luftflotte* 3 mounted an intruder mission in the early afternoon when 12 Bf 110s from ZG 26, with an escort of 130 Bf 109s from JG 2 and JG 3, set out to attack targets in Southampton. Two of the intercepting British squadrons were surprised by the escort and pilots from JG 2 accounted for one Hurricane and two Spitfires destroyed. A few miles to the east, II./JG 51 was carrying out a fighter sweep over Hastings, during which part of the formation was attacked by Hurricanes. However, the German top cover descended on the attackers and one Hurricane was shot down. At the same time, 249 Sqn. suffered a similar loss as they were climbing over Kent to intercept the Bf 109s of JG 26. Attacked from behind by a group of fighters led by *Obstlt.* Galland, one Hurricane was shot down with the badly burned pilot baling out.

Meanwhile, over the northern shore of the Thames Estuary, I./JG 26 became involved in a battle with 19 Sqn. at Southend. The 2. *Staffel* lost Fw. Wolfgang Kaminsky, whose 'Black 13' crashed into

4. Although Teumer had made a total of 170 war flights, 80 of them against England, he had no victory claims. His 'Black 12' was retained by the RAF and test flown as DG200. Today it is on display at the RAF Museum in Hendon, North London.

the sea, and also *Uffz.* Heinz Wolf, who forced landed his crippled 'Brown 2' at Udimore where he was later captured.

Later that afternoon, JG 2 carried out a second mission to Southampton. Catching 609 Sqn. from above, JG 2 was in a perfect 'bounce' position and, with *Major* Wick in the lead, dived down upon the enemy aircraft. Singling out a Spitfire, Wick shot it down off the Isle of Wight. As his 56th victim fell towards the sea, Wick turned away and was immediately attacked and damaged by a Spitfire, almost certainly that flown by *Ft/Lt.* John Dundas. Wick was never seen again. Moments later, *Oblt.* Rudolf Pflanz positioned himself behind the aircraft that had destroyed his leader and, after a brief chase, shot it down into the sea south of Bournemouth.

Jagdwaaffe operations during the daylight hours of 29 November again consisted of a mixture of *Jabo* missions, sporadic attacks on shipping and fighter sweeps over Kent towards London, all to little avail. Shortly after midday, 249 Sqn. was patrolling above Maidstone when two Hurricanes, flown by *F/O* Richard Barclay and *Sgt.* Davidson, were sent to investigate a lone raider approaching Dover. As the raider turned back towards France, they were rejoining the squadron when, with alarming speed, Barclay was shot down. He later recalled:

"I was told to look to the north-west over Maidstone for the squadron. Suddenly, four explosions down my right-hand side. I realised that they were cannon shells and as I whipped into a left-hand turn over Davidson two more explosions, and something hit me hard in the right leg but didn't hurt. I felt waves of hot air and the Hurricane went into a spin from which I couldn't recover, so I decided to bale

"We waited in vain until late into the night"

JULIUS MEIMBERG, STAFFELKAPITÄN OF 4./JG 2

In the late afternoon of 28 November 1940, we took off from Beaumont-le-Roger for our second mission of the day. It was a bright, clear, late-Autumn day and *Jagdgeschwader* 'Richthofen' climbed in the direction of the Isle of Wight with the *Kommodore*, *Major* Wick, his wingman *Oblt.* Rudolf Pflanz and the rest of the *Stab* flight in the lead.

I was leading the two flights of the 4. *Staffel* behind the *Geschwader Stab*. We reached 7,000 metres and visibility was excellent. Diagonally below us lay the Isle of Wight and beyond, the green fields of England began to appear. Above us, a large number of contrails flew towards us¹. It was a beautiful sight, but we had no time to enjoy it as the straight, white plumes arced straight towards us and then dissolved into nothing as they lost height and turned into small, flashing specks. It was a formation of Spitfires. They had the advantage of height and they were attacking from a favourable position.

Major Wick had the habit of flying at full throttle while in combat. The *Stab* flight tried to follow, climbing at full power, but it was impossible and the flight became spread out. I climbed, with the 4. *Staffel* somewhat staggered to one side, trying to achieve a good position yet at the same time hold the formation together. I had no way of knowing whether there were more Spitfires closing with us from below the contrail height and which would be difficult to see. Then we were attacked, the aircraft of the *Staffel* separated and the dogfight began. I saw a single Spitfire to one side and became involved in a turning contest but I was unable to position myself behind him. To allow sufficient lead I had to pull back on the stick so that the Spitfire disappeared under my nose, then I fired. When the Spitfire appeared again, I saw no visible evidence that I had hit it but the aircraft made a steep climbing turn and immediately went into a spin. I followed, thinking that this was some trick and that the pilot wanted me to think he'd been hit and would soon pull out, but he kept on spinning.

If this had not been such a life-and-death situation, I would have said that the sight before me was almost picturesque. It seemed that the red glow of the evening sun was reflecting off his canopy as the apparently undamaged green and brown camouflaged Spitfire spun towards the smooth, dark surface of the sea below. It spun lower and lower, and I waited for the pilot to bale out but nothing happened. Then it occurred to me that, even when the spinning Spitfire's canopy was in shadow, the cockpit still glowed red. Falling lower and lower towards the sparkling, blue-green mirror of the sea, the Spitfire finally disappeared in a white splash. I think the aircraft was burning inside and maintain that this is possible when the oxygen cylinder is hit. I experienced something similar in 1943 when I was shot down in Tunisia, but I never experienced another air combat such as this.

Once we had landed, Rudolf Pflanz reported that Helmut Wick had shot down one Spitfire but had then been attacked by another which he, Pflanz, had shot down. No one was able to see what had happened to Wick's aircraft but we all hoped he had baled out and would return. We waited in vain until late into the night and he has been missing ever since.



1. It should be noted that most accounts, including the report submitted by JG 2 on the loss of Wick (see Page 331), state that the Spitfires were below the German aircraft.

“A Special Operation”

RUDOLF ROTHENFELDER, III./JG 2

At the end of September 1940, we often used the airfield at the fortress of Querqueville as an alternate landing field to that at Cherbourg. It was located adjacent to the sea and due to its location and small size it was not easy to approach for landing. On 28 October, the *Reichsmarschall* arrived in Beaumont where he inspected the *Geschwader*, handed out awards and announced promotions. On the same day, he paid us a surprise visit at Querqueville. We had just returned from England and a photograph of the *Reichsmarschall's* visit to us was published on the front page of *Der Adler*.

In October we saw for the first time Mc 110s equipped with 250 and 500 kg bombs. We often escorted them and saw them releasing their bombs in a steep, low-level attack. Then the fighters met with the same fate. The design engineers had discovered that instead of an auxiliary fuel tank between the landing gear, a bomb could be carried and such targets as ships in the Channel could be successfully attacked in a steep dive.

As fighter pilots, we were not keen on the idea, but we could not protest and the *Jabo* was born! In our *Gruppe*, the 7. *Staffel* re-equipped as the *Jabo-Staffel*. *Oblt.* Machold, the *Staffelkapitän*, was anything but enthusiastic. He was one of the first who ended up in captivity on one of these missions. We not only escorted the bomber units to England but also our own comrades who, naturally, after successfully dropping their bombs, became more manoeuvrable and could revert to the fighter role.

In October we also had to prepare for a special operation. On the 20th, the entire *Geschwader* transferred in great secrecy to Tours and then, on the 22nd, we proceeded to Bordeaux. No one knew what this was all about but it was rumoured that we would fly over Spain to attack Gibraltar! This supposition was reinforced when at 19.15 hrs on the 22nd, we took off from Bordeaux and landed at Mont-de-Marsan, close to the Spanish border. We were highly disappointed when we discovered that the real reason for the operation was that we had to protect the *Führer* during his discussions with Franco. Disappointed, we returned to Le Havre and arrived in the evening of the 26th.

On the 16 November, the III. *Gruppe* transferred to Bernay where it remained until 23 April 1941. On 30 November, the last mission to the British Isles was flown, and then the *Geschwader* prepared for the Winter, the remaining *Gruppen* staying at Beaumont-le-Roger.

In the meantime it was determined that the pilots coming to the front from the fighter training schools in Germany required additional operational training, and at the beginning of November 1940, the *Ergänzungsstaffel* of JG 2 was established in Le Havre under *Hptm.* Kröck. Some of our pilots became fighter instructors, including *Stabsfw.* Franz Jänisch and *Obfw.* Keil from I. *Gruppe* and *Fw.* Hans Otto and *Fw.* Kurt Goltzsch from the II. *Gruppe*. At the end of December, I was transferred to Le Havre where we were to train the new pilots in conditions at the front. We lived in the most beautiful chateau in Le Havre. It belonged to the multimillionaire Dubosque and his family and, relieved of the responsibility of maintaining readiness, we had the opportunity to visit and become acquainted with the city. *Hptm.* Kröck left us in February 1941. His successor was *Oblt.* Horst Steinhardt who came to us from a close-reconnaissance unit.



As described by Rudolf Rothenfelder, Reichsmarschall Göring's visit to elements of III./JG 2 at Querqueville on 28 October 1940 was recorded by a PK cameraman whose photograph later appeared on the cover of the Luftwaffe magazine 'Der Adler'.

out. All this, of course, in a couple of seconds. Back with the roof, straps undone and lean out and push with feet on dashboard. No result. Back into cockpit, undo oxygen bayonet connection and try again. This time I'm out straightaway and fell forward over the leading edge missing the propeller by inches!"

Richard Barclay landed safely near Tunbridge Wells with ankle, leg and elbow wounds and was taken to a hospital where the nose-cap of a cannon shell was removed from his right ankle. His assailant in this episode had probably been *Fw.* Koch of 5./JG 26 who claimed a Hurricane in the Tonbridge area at this time.

On 30 November, widespread fog covered areas of southern England but a number of fighter sweeps were flown by Bf 109s covering *Jabo* attacks against London where some 2.5 tons of bombs were dropped on Westminster, Chelsea and the surrounding area. A high-flying *freie Jagd* by JG 53 was intercepted over Ramsgate by Spitfires of 74 Sqn. which accounted for three German fighters without loss to themselves. Of the three, *Uffz.* Fritz Wägelein, flying on his second mission of the day, was forced to abandon his 'Grey 3' over Ham Street when his engine seized and caught fire. He landed seriously injured and later died. The second Bf 109 lost was flown by *Fw.* Hermann Schmid who had taken off late and had flown alone over Kent hoping to catch up with his *Staffel*. Unable to locate it, he had just turned for home when his engine caught fire, forcing him to land his 'White 11' at New Romney where he was taken prisoner. The third Bf 109 lost was *Gefr.* Franz Zerr of 9./JG 53 who ditched his 'Yellow 5' in the Channel and was rescued by the *Seenotdienst*. Interestingly, both Wägelein and Schmid were unaware they had been shot down and thought they had suffered engine trouble, but these three 74 Sqn. victories were particularly significant as they brought the total number claimed by the Biggin Hill squadrons to 600.

Helmut Wick

Helmut Wick was born in Mannheim on 5 August 1915. He was one of three children and, because his father's work as an engineer involved frequent moves, the family lived variously in Heidelberg, Hannover, Danzig and Königsberg. At one of these locations, the family home was near an airfield where the sight and sound of the aircraft fascinated Helmut and remained one of his most vivid childhood memories. Despite this early interest in aviation however, he first studied to become a forester but later, when the air force began calling for recruits, his enthusiasm for aviation was reawakened and, in March 1935, Helmut volunteered for service with the *Luftwaffe*.

On 6 April 1936, Helmut Wick was a *Fähnjunker* and by July 1937 had been promoted to *Fähnrich*, both terms referring to ranks for officer cadets. Because of his mental and physical qualities, he was recommended for fighter pilot training and later joined I./JG 135 (later I./JG 51) commanded by *Oberst* Max Ibel. At the end of 1938 Wick transferred to I./JG 133 (the future I./JG 53), then based in Wiesbaden under *Major* Hans-Hugo Witt, and on 1 January 1939 *Lt.* Wick was posted to the 1. *Staffel* of JG 133. This *Staffel* was commanded by *Hptm.* Werner Mölders, one of the best fighter leaders, and even at the height of his fame Wick would never forget that he had learned all he knew from Mölders.

Early Victories

On 30 August 1939, Wick was transferred to *Hptm.* Hennig Strümpell's 3./JG 2 based in Berlin/Döberitz and when war broke out against Poland on 1 September, this unit remained to protect Berlin. In early November, the *Staffel* was transferred to Rebstock, behind the Siegfried Line, and during the so-called 'Phoney War', was engaged daily in long patrol flights over the Franco-German border. It was during one such flight, on 22 November, that Wick claimed his first victory. As the French were reluctant to cross the border, Wick's formation flew to the Nancy area where they became involved in a fight with some Curtiss Hawk 75A-1s and Wick succeeded in shooting down the aircraft flown by Sgt. Pierre Saillard of GC II/4 which crashed near Phalsbourg. Further border patrol flights continued, but during the winter months there were fewer encounters although on 30 April 1940, *Lt.* Wick, together with *Lt.* Rudolf Pflanz and *Obt.* Jobst Hauenschield became involved in a combat with a Potez 63.11 east of Merzig. The three pilots put in a joint claim but it was apparently awarded to *Lt.* Pflanz.

It was during the campaign in the West that Wick began his career as one of the *Luftwaffe*'s greatest aces, though only after a slow start. Although his *Staffel* comrades had scored victories, Wick was unlucky and found himself unable to manoeuvre into a sufficiently favourable position. It seems his luck might have changed on 17 May when Wick claimed three Léo 451 bombers, but in fact none of his claims was confirmed. Wick's next large battle came on 18 May when his *Staffel* claimed six Blenheims, but again Wick himself was unable to score. Finally, on the 20th, 3./JG 2 again became involved in a battle with Léo 451 bombers in the Laon-St. Quentin-Péronne area and two of the *Staffel*'s seven claims were awarded to Wick.

At the end of May, Wick claimed two Fairey Swordfish in the Calais area and although one forced landed at Calais-Marcq and the other crashed into the sea in flames, these were not confirmed due to a lack of witnesses. However, any disappointment was soon forgotten in the events of 5 June. Wick was flying with *Obt.* Hauenschield when they attacked some 15 to 20 Bloch 151s. The first kill went to *Obt.* Hauenschield who shot one down at 17.10 hrs, but within a few minutes Wick had shot down another three. Five minutes later, on the way home, Wick accounted for a Morane-Saulnier 406 and was welcomed as a hero. Never since the war began had anyone claimed four victories in a single flight.

Thereafter, Wick's score increased regularly. On 6 June he shot down two Bloch 151s near Compiègne and on the evening of the 8th Wick destroyed another Bloch 151 and a Morane 406 in the Soissons-Reims area. His 12th confirmed victory, a Blenheim near Soissons on 9 June made Wick the leading ace in the '*Richtbofen*' *Geschwader* and brought the award of the EK I. Wick's last confirmed victory of the campaign, a Fairey Battle shot down near Montdidier-Provins, occurred at 21.10 hrs on 13 June. A Spitfire claimed on 17 June was not confirmed and Wick therefore ended the French campaign with 13 confirmed victories, placing him fourth on the list of highest-scoring German pilots.

At the same time, I./JG 2, which then had a total of 123 *Abschüsse*, was restructured. In the 3. *Staffel*, *Hptm.* Hennig Strümpell became *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Alexander von Winterfeldt became



Major Helmut Wick, Kommodore of JG 2, wearing the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves.

Wick's aircraft marked with 28 kills. Note that, as shown here, the victory tabs do not run chronologically from top to bottom, the solitary uppermost tab being the latest, applied after the last in the bottom row.



Staffelkapitän of 8./JG 2, *Oblt.* Hauenschield was transferred to another unit and, on 23 June 1940, Wick became *Staffelführer* of 3./JG 2.

After a short rest following the fighting in France, Wick and his pilots were looking forward to increasing the *Staffel's* score, but although the *Geschwaderstab* and 1. *Staffel* claimed two Spitfires on 9 July, most missions were convoy protection sorties and the situation was generally quiet. Then, on 17 July, Wick took off with his wingman, *Lt.* Franz Fiby, to intercept a Blenheim returning to England after a mission over France. Despite a chase, the two pilots were unable to catch the Blenheim and broke off to establish where they were. Through a hole in the clouds, they saw that, although at that time forbidden, they had flown over the English coast. Nevertheless, Wick decided he would try to find something to shoot down before returning and after a search, Wick and Fiby saw below them the 14 Spitfires of 64 Sqn. with one aircraft flying some distance behind acting as 'Holzauger' ¹. Wick attacked and shot down this lone Spitfire leaving its wounded pilot, F/O Donald Taylor, to crash-land at Hailsham.

With the start of the Battle of Britain, victories followed quickly and 11 July proved to be a very successful day for I. and III./JG 2 which claimed 20 victories, Wick claiming a Hawk 75² and two Spitfires. On 21 July, Wick was promoted *Oberleutnant* and on 1 August was officially appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 3./JG 2. After claiming two apparently unconfirmed Hurricanes on 16th and 24 August, Wick then claimed a Hurricane and a Spitfire near Portland on 25 August and two Hurricanes near Portsmouth on 26th. This brought Wick's total to 21 victories, and on the 27th he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz*, this being presented on the 29th at Karinhall by *Reichsmarschall* Göring who also granted Wick four days' leave to spend with his wife and family.

Returning to the front, Wick claimed two Hurricanes on 4 September and by the 7th he had claimed a further five victories although only four were confirmed. On the same day, Wick was promoted to *Hauptmann* and became *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./JG 2. *Hptm.* Wick's predecessor, *Hptm.* Strümpell recalled:

"I was assigned to *Jafü* Osterkamp and turned the *Gruppe* over to *Hptm.* Wick. He was a nice man and I knew him well. He flew on every operation and was aggressive in combat. This could not be sustained and one day I told him that he would mentally or physically collapse or that he would be shot down. He always fought at full throttle to get the most speed from his aircraft and once I told Wick's mechanics to change his engine because of this."

A Meeting with the Führer

By the end of September, Wick had claimed another nine *Abschüsse* and another five in two missions flown on 5 October, bringing his total to 41 official victories. That evening, he received a telephone call informing him that the *Reichsmarschall* wanted to see him the next day at the RLM. Wick had just 15 hours to travel to Berlin and he and his friend *Oblt.* Pflanz drove throughout the night in order to be on time. It was clear that Wick would receive the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross, but tantalisingly, during a meal with Göring, *Generalfeldmarschall* Milch, *Generaloberst* Udet and *Generals* Bodenschatz and Student, no mention was made of the *Eichenlaub*. At the end of the meal, Göring finally said, "Now, my dear Wick, you are to take a special train to Berchtesgarden where somebody is waiting for you!" Thus, on 6 October, the *Führer* welcomed Wick and personally presented him with the Oak Leaves. At the same time Hitler promoted him to *Major*, making him the youngest man of that rank in the *Wehrmacht*.

Back with his *Gruppe*, *Major* Wick claimed a Spitfire shot down on 15 October. On the 20th, *Göring* declared, "The *Führer* has promoted him to



The machine parked in the background of this photograph is believed to have been Wick's reserve aircraft. In order to distinguish it from his normal machine, the *Kommodore's* insignia has been modified to include a vertical bar. Unfortunately, the *Werk* Number of this aircraft is not known.



The first award of the Oak Leaves went to General Dietl in July 1940 for his involvement in the capture of Narvik, so that after Mölders and Galland, Helmut Wick was the fourth member of the German armed forces and the third member of the *Luftwaffe* to receive the Oak Leaves. The Oak Leaves were personally presented to Wick by the *Führer* at Berchtesgarden on 6 October 1940.



BELOW: Major Wick running up the engine of his Bf 109 E. Note that although the machine was very well maintained it had served Wick for some months and was beginning to show signs of heavy use. At one time, the spinner and cowling of this aircraft were painted white. When repainted yellow, these components were removed so that, when replaced, the spinner backplate remained white, as may be seen in this view. The DB 601 engine was generally regarded as a very clean engine and did not normally leak oil, but the stains on the lower cowling indicate where, on this aircraft, oil has seeped through the panel joints. Wick always entered combat at full throttle and wore out engines abnormally quickly.

ABOVE AND BELOW: Wick's aircraft (*ABOVE*) when Kommandeur of I./JG 2. Note the 42 victories recorded on the rudder and (*BELOW*) the personal emblem beneath and behind the cockpit.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4, W.Nr. 5344, flown by Major Helmut Wick, Kommandeur of JG 2 'Richthofen'

This aircraft is depicted as it appeared shortly before Wick was lost during combat over the English Channel on 28 November 1940. The earlier Gruppenkommandeur's markings have been painted out and Kommandeur's insignia applied, and the fuselage Balkenkreuz has been modified with wider black outer corner segments. The yellow spinner retains a white backplate and Wick's small bird emblem appears over the lower arm of the chevron. Wick's victory tally was constantly being updated and his ground crew finally replaced, or repainted, the rudder with the 54 victory tabs arranged to form a solid panel, as shown. Before Wick's last mission, however, the yellow areas of the rudder were further modified with the same green stipple as seen on the fuselage.





BELOW: Ground staff with Wick's recently repainted yellow rudder, marked with 54 victory bars.



TOP, ABOVE AND BELOW: Wick's aircraft when Kommodore of JG 2. Clearly visible in some views are the areas where Wick's previous Kommandeur markings have been oversprayed and in the photograph (*ABOVE LEFT*), the bird emblem has been re-applied. Note also that the rudder markings have been completely revised to run from top to bottom and that eventually the whole rudder was completely repainted a bright yellow and the 54 victory bars regrouped. The photographs (*BELOW*) show the rudder again but modified with the addition of the same stipple as applied to the fuselage.



JAGDGESCHWADER RICHTHOFEN Nr.2
Gefechtsstand, 24.10.40.

Geschwaderbefehl.

Der Herr Reichsmarschall hat mir die hohe Ehre erwiesen, mich als Kommodore an die Spitze des ruhmreichen Jagdgeschwaders Richthofen Nr.2 zu berufen. Ich habe mit dem heutigen Tage die Führung des Geschwaders übernommen. Mein besonderer Dank gilt meinem Vorgänger Major Schellmann, der es in vorbildlicher Weise verstanden hat, die Tradition des Richthofen - Geschwaders zu wahren und seinen Ruhm zu mehren.

Ich bin mir der großen verpflichtenden Verantwortung durchaus bewusst und bin gewillt, in dem bisherigen Geiste der restlosen Einsatzbereitschaft Aller, das Geschwader zu führen. Ich will Euer Führer im Sinne des Vorlebens und Vorlebens, zugleich aber Euer bester Kamerad sein. In diesem Sinne weiterhin vorwärts von Sieg zu Sieg, bis zum Endsieg.

Wick

Geschwader Command.

The Reichsmarschall has bestowed upon me the great honour of taking command of the famous Jagdgeschwader Richthofen No. 2. As of today I have taken over the leadership of the Geschwader. I must express special thanks to my predecessor, Major Schellmann, for the splendid example he has set, not only in upholding the tradition of the Geschwader, but also adding to its fame.

I am fully aware of the duty and responsibility I am accepting and undertake to lead the Geschwader in the same spirit of total combat readiness you have all displayed in the past. I intend to be your leader by the personal example I set and the achievements I accomplish. At the same time I intend to be your truest comrade. In this spirit may we continue from victory to victory - until final victory has been achieved.

Wick

A copy, left, of Wick's Geschwaderbefehl announcing his position as Kommodore of JG 2 'Richthofen' with, above right, a translation.

Major, I promote him to *Kommodore*", and within a few days the existing *Kommodore*, Major Wolfgang Schellmann had left to succeed Major Bernhard Woldenga as commander of JG 27.

Major Hannes Trautloft, former *Kommodore* of JG 54, knew Wick and recalled:

"Despite all his awards and honours, Wick remained a modest and considerate superior and was respected and admired by all his pilots. One day, a *General*, the commander of the *Fliegerschule* at Dresden, hoping to profit from the experiences of his former pupil, visited the '*Richthofen*' *Geschwader* on the Channel coast with some of his staff. Engaging the young *Kommodore* in conversation, the *General* boasted, "My dear Wick, of course I knew at Dresden that you would become someone special", to which Wick replied, '*Herr General*, I suppose that's why you failed me on the first officer candidate test.'"

Even as *Kommodore*, Wick continued to fly and lead his men. On 29 October near Portsmouth, he claimed a Hurricane at 15.29 hrs and a Spitfire four minutes later. Three more claims followed on 5 November, five on the 6th, one of the 7th, one on the 8th and another, apparently unconfirmed, on the 10th.

By the morning of 28 November 1940, Major Helmut Wick had 54 victories, the same number as the *Kommodore* of JG 51, *Obstlt.* Mölders, and close behind the 56 of *Obstlt.* Adolf Galland. At 14.20 hrs that afternoon, Wick led JG 2 in a sweep over Southern England and 50 minutes later claimed his 55th victory, a Spitfire north-east of the Isle of Wight.

After returning to its base, JG 2 took off at 16.30 hrs on the second mission of the day, destined to be the *Kommodore*'s last. Visibility was good as the *Jagdgeschwader Richthofen* climbed in the direction of the Isle of Wight with Major Wick, his wingman *Oblt.* Pflanz and the *Stab* flight in the lead. After about 40 minutes, JG 2 was again near the Isle of Wight where the *Stab* became involved in a large air battle and Wick shot

down a Spitfire of 609 Sqn. killing the pilot, P/O Paul Baillon. It was the *Kommodore*'s last victory and his last flight. The accompanying accounts, one by *Lt.* Julius Meimberg of 4./JG 2 (See Page 324) and the other an official *Luftwaffe* report (opposite), describe in detail what is known of Major Wick's last flight, but it seems almost certain that after shooting down P/O Baillon, Wick was shot down by 609 Squadron's F/Lt John Dundas, and that almost immediately afterwards Dundas himself was attacked and shot down by Wick's wingman, *Oblt.* Pflanz.

Subsequently, the *Luftwaffe* did everything possible to locate Wick. Many search flights were made and even the British authorities were contacted³ to enquire if they had a certain Major Helmut Wick among their PoWs, but no trace of him, his dinghy or his aircraft have ever been found. The next day, Wick's closest friends, *Oblt.* Pflanz and *Oblt.* Erich Leie, travelled to Berlin to inform Wick's wife and parents of the tragedy.

Many theories have been put forward to account for Wick's death. *Hptm.* Strümpell was convinced that Wick was an easier target because his engine was suffering from wear and tear and was not giving him top performance, while some historians believe he may have collided with debris from Baillon's Spitfire. Equally possible is that Wick was by now suffering from severe nervous strain, a view perhaps supported by the errors of judgement he displayed during the flight to Brest on 17 October (See Page 298) and his diary entry of 6 November 1940 in which he wondered if he was not well or if his nerves

Erich Leie and Helmut Wick were close friends; Leie was flying as his Rottenflieger on 28 November when Wick went missing.



This photograph of Göring, Jeschonnek and Wick was probably taken shortly before 14 November 1940, on which date Göring handed over temporary command of the *Luftwaffe* to Milch. Both Göring and Jeschonnek, centre, then went on extended leave. Note Göring's cuff title which was worn to commemorate the tradition of Göring's First World War unit and reads "Jagdgeschwader Fhr. v. Richthofen Nr.1 1917/18".



were frayed. Certainly *Hptm.* Strümpell thought that if it was not a poorly performing engine which led to his death then it may have been the pressure he was under to become the *Luftwaffe's* leading ace ⁴. The fame and hero-worship the Third Reich meted out to its warriors and the rivalry that the news media fostered between them may well have raised public morale and enhanced the general *esprit de corps* of fellow fighter pilots but, equally, such exploitation also cruelly encouraged young men to exert themselves beyond their capabilities. Although *Major Wick* did not acquire the same reputation as Galland or Mölders and although some of his contemporaries doubted the accuracy of his score, he is fondly remembered by the few surviving members of JG 2 for his humanitarian qualities, his kind manner and enthusiasm for life.



F/Lt John Charles Dundas of 609 Sqn., the pilot who is believed to have shot down Wick and who was himself then shot down by Oblt. Rudolf Pflanz.

LOSS OF MAJOR WICK

Copy, telex

To: Robinson, Command Staff 1c

Luftflotte 3,

V. Fliegerkorps

7Jafü 3

On 28.11.40 the second mission for JG 2 was an assignment to fly a fighter sweep in the area of Southampton-Isle of Wight-Portsmouth. Assigned to the Geschwader was one flight from II./JG 77. A total of 38 aircraft took off from Cherbourg-West and Théville. JG 2 took off at 16.30 hrs and climbed to 4,000 metres near the coast. Flying a course towards the Isle of Wight, the unit had climbed to 10,500 metres by the time they reached the English coast. The experience of the first mission of the day, when English combat units had flown at altitudes exceeding 11,000 metres, dictated that this altitude be flown in order to intercept the enemy. The weather was clear throughout the day and visibility was more than 100 km.

The command flight, consisting of Major Wick, Oblt. Leie, Oblt. Pflanz, and Lt. Fiby, was approaching the English coast at 10,200 metres when a Spitfire squadron was sighted flying at 8,500-9,000 metres in the direction of Portsmouth and climbing. Major Wick positioned himself to attack this squadron. In the meantime the staff flight had become greatly separated from the rest of the formation since the Kommodore flew at full throttle in order to reach the English. Major Wick had to turn left so that the two wingmen on the left could also get into attack position but Oblt. Leie, on the right, was forced further out. Major Wick was able to carry out his attack on the English squadron without distraction and scored his 56th air victory. Two Spitfires flying cover behind, to the right and 500 metres above this squadron were evidently not noticed by Major Wick. Both of these Englishmen saw Wick's attack and thus the rest of the staff flight was prevented from making an attack on these two Spitfires which escaped to safety by carrying out a Split-S manoeuvre.

After the Kommodore attacked the Spitfire squadron, he pulled up left into the sun. The staff flight was attempting to follow when Wick was suddenly attacked from a superior altitude by about 20-30 Spitfires. Here, Oblt. Leie was able to get into firing position behind a solitary Englishman but he thereby lost sight of the other two aircraft of the staff flight. Oblt. Pflanz and Lt. Fiby escaped the English attack by diving away and lost sight of each other. At about 2,000 metres Oblt. Pflanz saw two aircraft in front of him which were flying south. He contemplated joining these two aircraft but recognised one as an English aircraft which was turning left and followed him. At this moment Oblt. Pflanz noticed a parachute* at about 1,500 metres. Oblt. Pflanz positioned himself behind the Englishman and shot him down from a short distance. He observed the aircraft hit the sea at tremendous speed and saw both wings break off.

Flying home immediately afterwards, Oblt. Pflanz called the Sea Rescue Service which responded after several calls. He gave the position as: "40-50 km SSW western tip Isle of Wight, one German baled out, one Englishman in immediate vicinity." As the Rescue Service acknowledged the position, there developed a radio communication between another department and the rescue boat which stated it was 60 nautical miles from the scene and that the rescue centre at Cherbourg-West had been asked to send another boat to assist. Afterwards, since he was running short of fuel, Oblt. Pflanz had to land (at Bonneborg, 18 km. NW of Lisieux), and he returned to his unit two hours later. After landing, Oblt. Leie determined by communicating with other commands that the Kommodore was the only one from the mission who had not returned and that he had not landed at any other airfield on the Channel coast. This was reported to Jafü 3 (Major Beck) and the 1a (Operations Officer) of the command of the V. Fliegerkorps with the most urgent request to set into operation all possible assistance in the search for Major Wick.

JG Richthofen No. 2

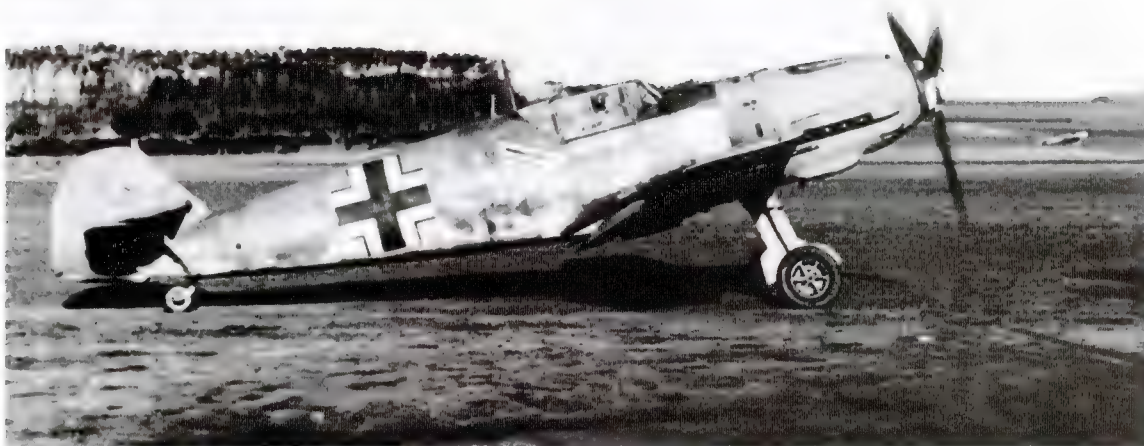
* There is no evidence that the parachute - if one was observed - was Wick's. Indeed, Kurt Bühligen and other pilots have stated that they saw Wick dead in his cockpit.

1. German term equivalent to 'Tail End Charlie'.

2. Clearly a case of misidentification.

3. The British replied two days later stating they had no knowledge of Wick's whereabouts.

4. Some historians maintain that at about 16.00 hrs on 28 November, JG 2 received a telephone call from JG 26 stating that Adolf Galland had added to his score and that Wick only flew his second sortie that day because he wanted to remain in the lead.



On 5 November, Hptm. Rolf Pingel, the Kommandeur of I./JG 26, claimed his 17th victory, a Spitfire, possibly of 19 Sqn. In this view (*ABOVE*) of Hptm. Pingel taxiing at Audembert in mid-November, the latest victory marking has been added to the rudder. (*RIGHT*) Another view of the 17 victory bars as ground crew help manoeuvre Pingel's aircraft. (*BELOW*) Ground crew assisting Hptm. Pingel with his life jacket after a mission, Audembert, Autumn 1940.

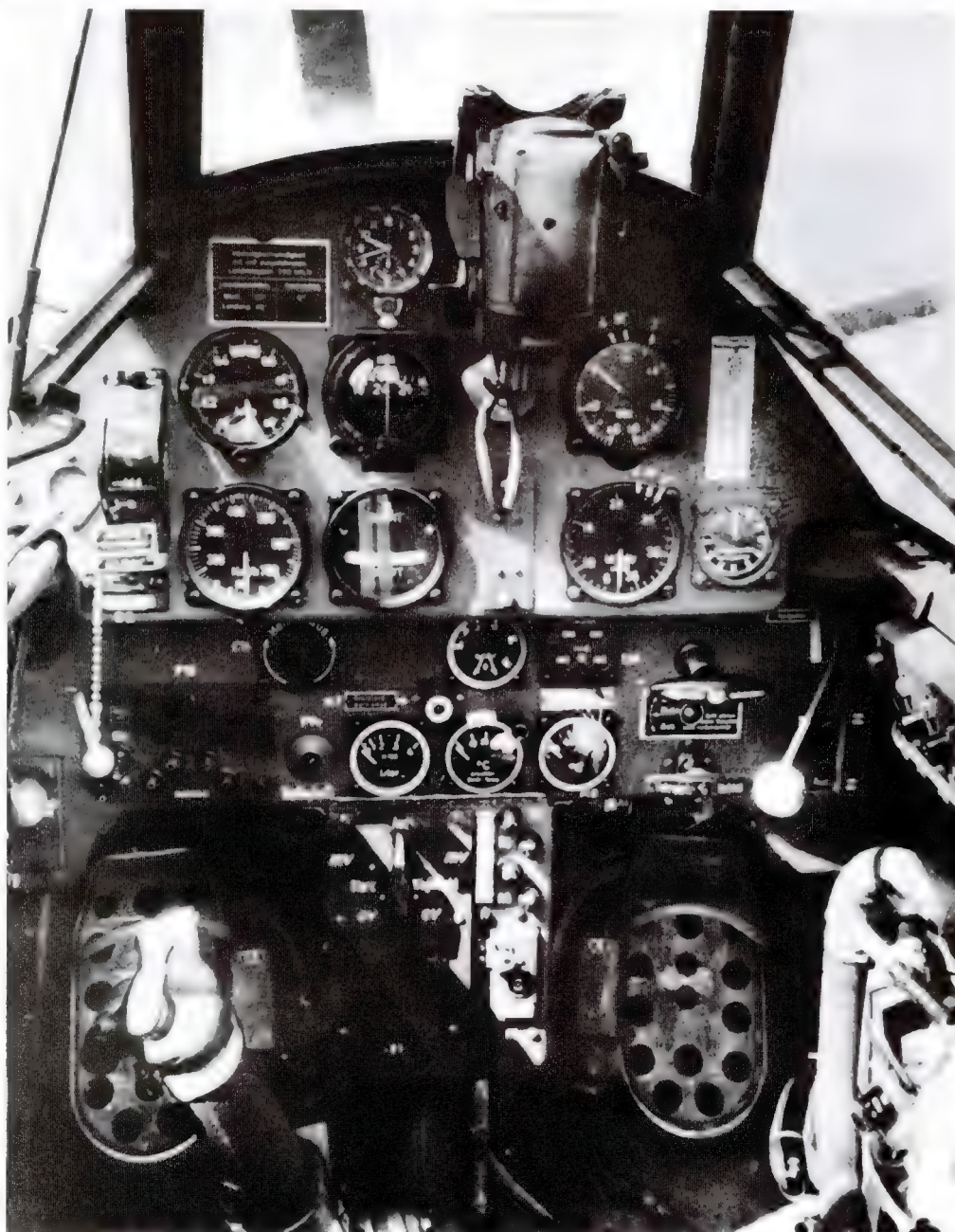


Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 of Gruppenstab I./JG 26 flown by Hptm. Rolf Pingel, Gruppenkommandeur
The Bf 109 E-4 of Hptm. Rolf Pingel of JG 26 as it appeared in mid-November. Finished in an uppersurface scheme of 02/71, the sides of the fuselage and fin carried a mottling of 02 and 71 applied in varying densities, through which part of the overpainted Stammkennzeichen ??+LV could be seen. Five flags were painted beneath the cockpit canopy on each side of the fuselage to represent the countries in which the pilot had fought, these being, from the rear in this view, Spain, Holland, Belgium, France and Great Britain. The JG 26 'Schlageter' shield was carried beneath the windscreen on each side of the fuselage and 17 red Abschussbalken appeared on a rectangle of Blue 65 on an otherwise yellow rudder.





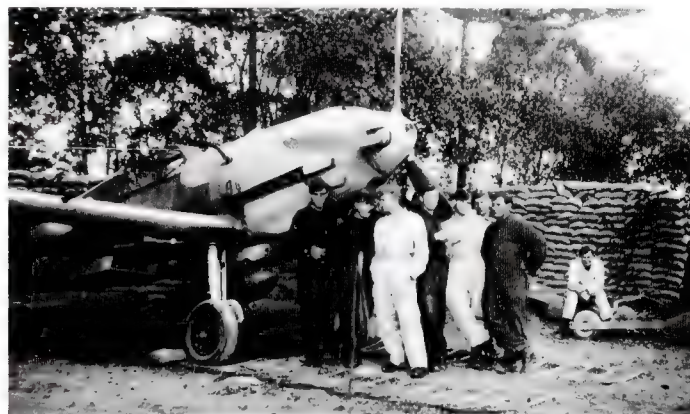
ABOVE: On 1 November, aircraft from Luftflotte 2 carried out six escorted Jabo operations against London and Jafü 3 conducted fighter operations against Portsmouth. Lt. Erich Schmidt of 9./JG 53 was escorting Jabos to England when RAF fighters attacked the fighter-bombers and in the combat which followed he claimed a Hurricane as his 16th victory. Here, Lt. Schmidt is seen describing the action. By the end of operations against England, Schmidt had 19 victories. Note the absence of a Hakenkreuz. A colour profile of this machine appears on Page 90 of Volume Two, Section 1.



ABOVE: A sinister embellishment to the ETC under a Bf 109 E of 3./JG 53. In this Geschwader, the Jabostaffeln were the 3., 4. and 8. Staffeln.

LEFT: The cockpit of a Bf 109 E, dominated by the Revi gunsight mounted on top of the instrument panel. The engine switch and undercarriage selector lever are on the left side of the panel, a standard range of flying instruments in the centre, and the engine instruments are on the right. Compared to the Spitfire, the Bf 109 was technically much simpler to fly, the throttle arrangement and the automatic propeller pitch setting in particular considerably reducing the pilot's workload.

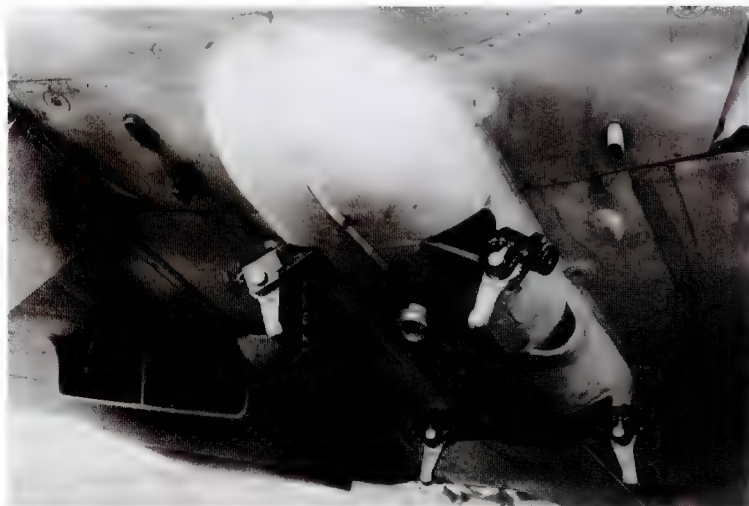
LEFT AND BELOW: Two photographs showing an aircraft of I./LG 2 at Calais-Marck, Autumn 1940. The hydraulic trolley used to transport bombs and raise them beneath the aircraft is the same type as that used by the Stukaverbände.



RIGHT: A Bf 109 E loaded with four SC 50 bombs. Stencilled on the side of the fairing is a reminder to weapons personnel that the front left bomb is the first to be released.



BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT: Close-up views of an ETC 250 and its fairing under a Bf 109. The first view (*BELOW*) shows details of the attachment, while (*RIGHT*), a standard SC 250 bomb has been loaded.





LEFT, CENTRE LEFT AND RIGHT: In the absence of the normal hydraulic trolley, ordinary manpower is being used to load SC 50 bombs beneath one of I.(J)/LG 2's Bf 109s. Whistles have been attached to the fins to enhance the noise of the bombs when falling.



RIGHT: Ready for operations. A bombed-up Bf 109 E-4/B of I.(J)/LG 2 loaded with four SC 50 bombs. From October 1940, both Gruppen of Lehrgeschwader 2 operated as fighter-bombers. Apart from the top hat emblem of 2. Staffel on the rear fuselage, this machine appears to lack most of the colourful refinements normally associated with operational units and even the spinner has been left in plain green.



RIGHT AND BELOW: An interesting camouflage scheme adopted by II./JG 54 is seen on 'Yellow 10' of 6./JG 54. The pattern consisted of meandering Green 70 lines over the Blue 65 fuselage sides, within which were patches of 02.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1/B 'Yellow 10' of II./JG 54

Displaying one of the more elaborate finishes introduced in late 1940, this aircraft has the standard 02/71 fuselage spine but with the 65 fuselage sides darkened with meandering 70 lines, within which are patches of 02. The finish was applied at unit level, though probably with the agreement of the RLM, and is believed to have been devised by II./JG 54. An almost identical finish has also been observed in use by JG 54 in the Balkans and in Russia. On this machine, the 70 spinner had a yellow cap and a white quarter segment.



LEFT: Pilots of 1./JG 2 with an aircraft displaying the 'Bonzo Dog' emblem introduced by Hptm. Otto Bertram. On the right is Lt. Dietrich Wickop of 9./JG 2 who, in early 1940, served with JG 52 until posted to 9./JG 2 as Staffelloffizier to assist the Staffelpapitän, Oblt. Carl-Hans Röders.

BELOW: Lt. Wickop poses with his 'Yellow 11' of 9./JG 2. He did not claim his first victory, a Spitfire, until 26 June 1942 but later became Kommandeur of II./JG 1 in which position he became very successful.



ABOVE: Pilots of 9./JG 77 at Cherbourg, late December 1940. From left to right, Uffz. Robert Helmer; unknown; Lt. Emil Omert; Stabsfeldwebel Georg Seckel; unknown; Ofw. Erwin Riehl. Note the Staffel emblem of a small, fair-haired boy with a large beer tankard, which was based on the trademark of a brewery.



LEFT: Pilots of 1./JG 77 listening to their Staffelpapitän, Oblt. Franz Hahn, as he explains how he shot down a Spitfire on 8 November 1940. This was Hahn's seventh victory.

November 1940

RIGHT: Oblt. Friedrich-Wilhelm Strakeljahn, the Staffelkapitän of 2.(J)/LG 2, had five victories by the end of 1940. Later, owing to his success as Staffelkapitän of the 14.(Jabo)/JG 5, he was awarded the Ritterkreuz.



ABOVE: This Jabo of 7./JG 26 was flown in late 1940 by Lt. Christian v. Schlieffen who scored his first victory on 25 June 1941 but was killed the following day. Christian von Schlieffen was a close relative of Count Alfred von Schlieffen who, in 1891, became Chief of the Great General Staff and was the author of the Schlieffen Plan for war against both France and Russia in the First World War.



ABOVE: Muddy conditions on a French airfield as Bf 109 E 'White 5' warms up its engine. The unit has not been positively identified, but the small fuselage cross suggests a Staffel of JG 26.

RIGHT: By mid-November many units were grounded due to the bad weather. This Bf 109 of an unknown unit has been provided with a protective, walled dispersal. Matting has been laid over areas likely to become muddy and poles have been erected to support camouflage netting. Despite the increased risk of sabotage, local labour was frequently drafted in to carry out such work and in one recorded instance, a workman sawed partly through the support poles. With the first high winds, the poles and camouflage netting collapsed onto the aircraft beneath resulting in damage sufficient to cause the machine to be withdrawn for repairs.



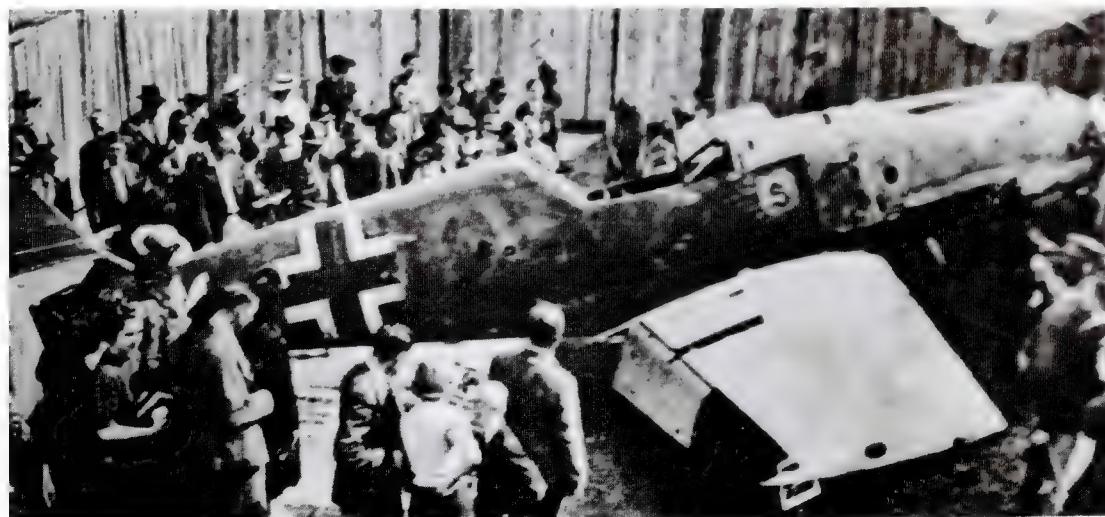
November 1940

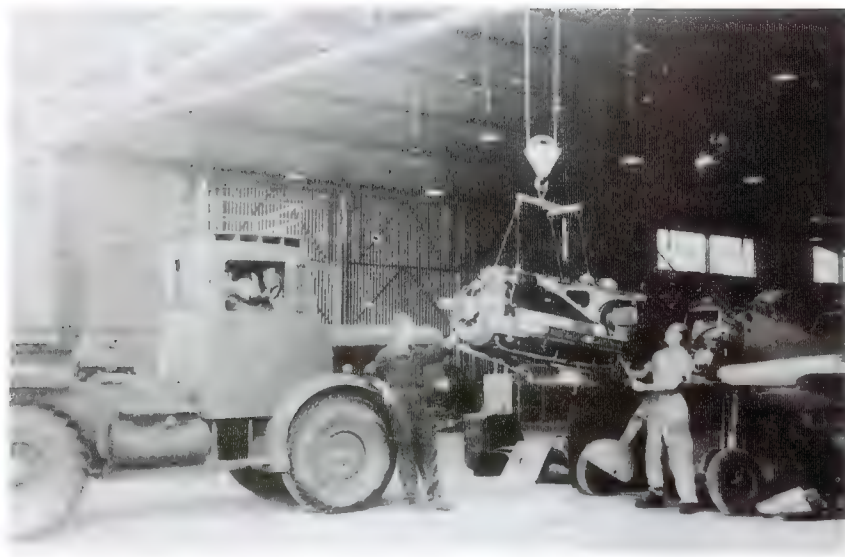


Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-3, W.Nr. 1289, flown by Uffz. Heinz Wolf of 2./JG 26 on 28 November 1940
 The fuselage camouflage on this aircraft was a high-demarcation 70/71 scheme with fairly dense 02/71 mottles. The number '2' on the fuselage was a dark reddish-brown with a black outline, and the painted-out letters 'FA' were still faintly visible aft of the Balkenkreuz.

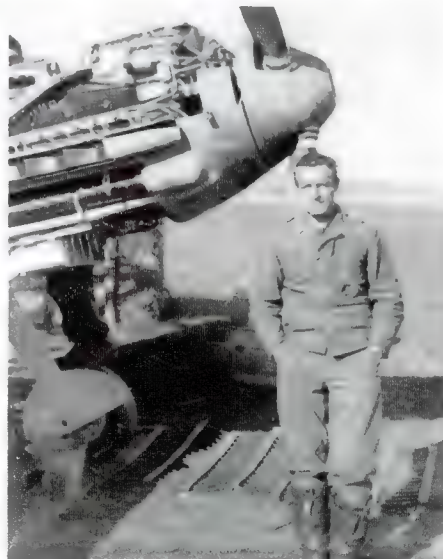


LEFT AND BELOW: Uffz. Heinz Wolf's Bf 109 E-3 'Brown 2', W.Nr. 1289, of 2./JG 26 which forced landed (*LEFT*) at Udimore, Sussex, on the afternoon of 28 November 1940. This aircraft was later shipped to South Africa where it is seen (*BELOW*) on display in 1942.





ABOVE: Normally, engines were changed after 100 hours, more frequently if required, and was a task which could be accomplished quite comfortably in a day, even when the heavy lifting equipment shown here was not available. This Bf 109 was operated by JG 53.



BELOW: Bf 109 E of Stab II./JG 51, Autumn 1940.



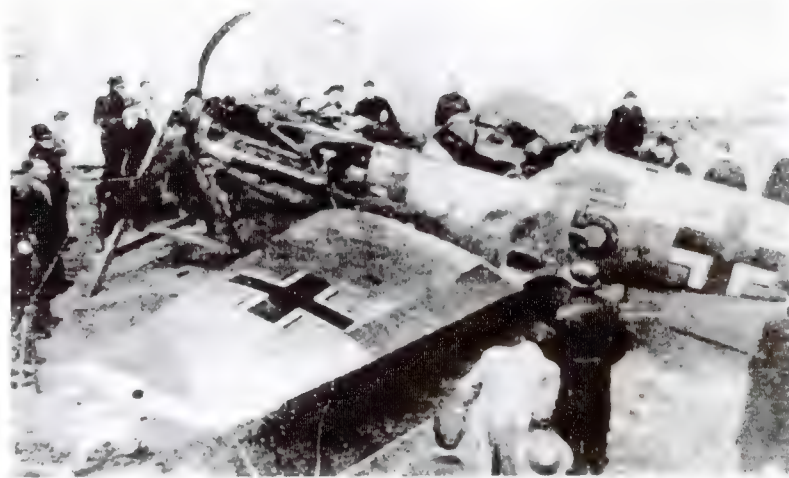
BELOW: This aircraft of 5./JG 53 on the Channel Front in November 1940 is believed to have been 'Green 5'. Green is known to have been used by this unit as a Staffel colour in the late Autumn of 1940.

ABOVE AND TOP: On 21 November 1940, I./JG 77 was redesignated IV./JG 51 and was the last Gruppe of that Geschwader to re-equip with the Bf 109 E. This 'Black 5' was flown by Uffz. Heinz Klöpfer of 11./JG 51, and the cross behind the fuselage Balkenkreuz is the symbol used at this time to identify aircraft of the IV. Gruppe. Klöpfer had originally flown with 2./JG 77 and in mid-April 1941, shortly after this photograph was taken, was promoted to Feldwebel. He scored his first victory on 5 October 1940 but claimed no more until JG 51 went to Russia. Then, however, he became most successful. He was awarded the RK on 4 September 1942 and later became Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 1. As an Oberleutnant with 94 victories, Klöpfer was killed on 29 November 1943.



ABOVE: Uffz. Alfred Rauch of 5./JG 51 returning from a Jabo sortie, late 1940. A future Ritterkreuzträger, Rauch claimed his first victory on 11 August 1940 and then mostly flew Jabo operations.

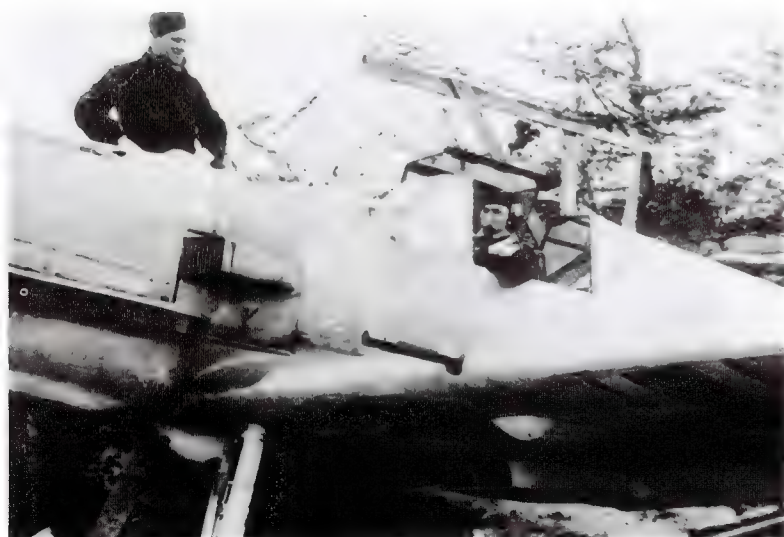
RIGHT: On the afternoon of 27 November 1940, 2./JG 51 took off from its base in the Calais area on a fighter-bomber mission while the 3./JG 51 made a diversionary freelance patrol. The 3. Staffel crossed the Channel at 22,000 ft, made landfall at Dungeness, and continued to Tunbridge Wells where it turned eastwards. On their right, the pilots saw a squadron of Spitfires flying towards them from the north. The British fighters flew across them, then turned and attacked from the rear. This aircraft, 'Brown 5' flown by Fw. Wilhelm Erdniss, received a number of hits in the oil system and the pilot made a forced landing near Horton Park, close to RAF Hawkinge. The aircraft was later shipped to New Zealand for exhibition and fund-raising purposes and is seen here in the capital, Wellington.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 of 3./JG 51 flown by Fw. Wilhelm Erdniss, 27 November 1940

This aircraft, 'Brown 5', W.Nr. 1653, is believed to have been finished in an uppersurface camouflage of 02 and a locally mixed grey. Although not mentioned in the RAF Crash Report, the above photograph of this aircraft suggests the wingtips were painted white as shown in the profile.

RIGHT: This aircraft, 'Brown 4' of 3./JG 51, made an emergency landing on the Belgian coast and is possibly another casualty from the costly mission of 27 November in which 2. and 3./JG 51 both lost two pilots killed and one taken PoW, i.e. a total of six pilots.



LEFT: Oblt. Hans Kolbow, Staffelkapitän of 5./JG 51, in his 'Black 1' equipped with an ETC rack for the fighter-bomber role. Oblt. Kolbow claimed 13 victories in France and against the RAF, but most of his missions in the Autumn of 1940 were Jabo operations. He was later killed in Russia and received a posthumous Ritterkreuz on 27 July 1941. Jabo operations against Britain were conducted at around 30,000 ft, hence the need for the oxygen mask seen in this photograph. Although electrically heated clothing was also available, some pilots preferred to fly without it as thick clothing made the cockpit of the Bf 109 too tight a fit. Instead, as experience proved that cold was most keenly felt in the knees and wrists, special thick wadding in the form of leather or sheepskin pads was worn to protect these areas.

November 1940



ABOVE: Bf 109 of 2./JG 54, parked outside a maintenance hangar. The aircraft carries the Staffel's emblem below the cockpit - a devil on a pitchfork - and has an interesting mottled scheme on the fuselage which appears slightly denser on the nose. The 'Benzinwasch' sign visible behind the spinner refers to a workshop degreasing facility.

BELOW: After the death of Major Wick at the end of November 1940, command of JG 2 passed to Wilhelm Balthasar, although confirmation of his position as Kommodore was not announced until February 1941. Early in the war, Balthasar is believed to have adopted a personal emblem of three wasps, but in this photograph, taken in December 1940, the first letter of his surname, a letter 'B', has been painted below his cockpit. Note that the 'Richthofen' shield has been applied in outline form directly onto the camouflage finish and lacks the more usual coloured background.

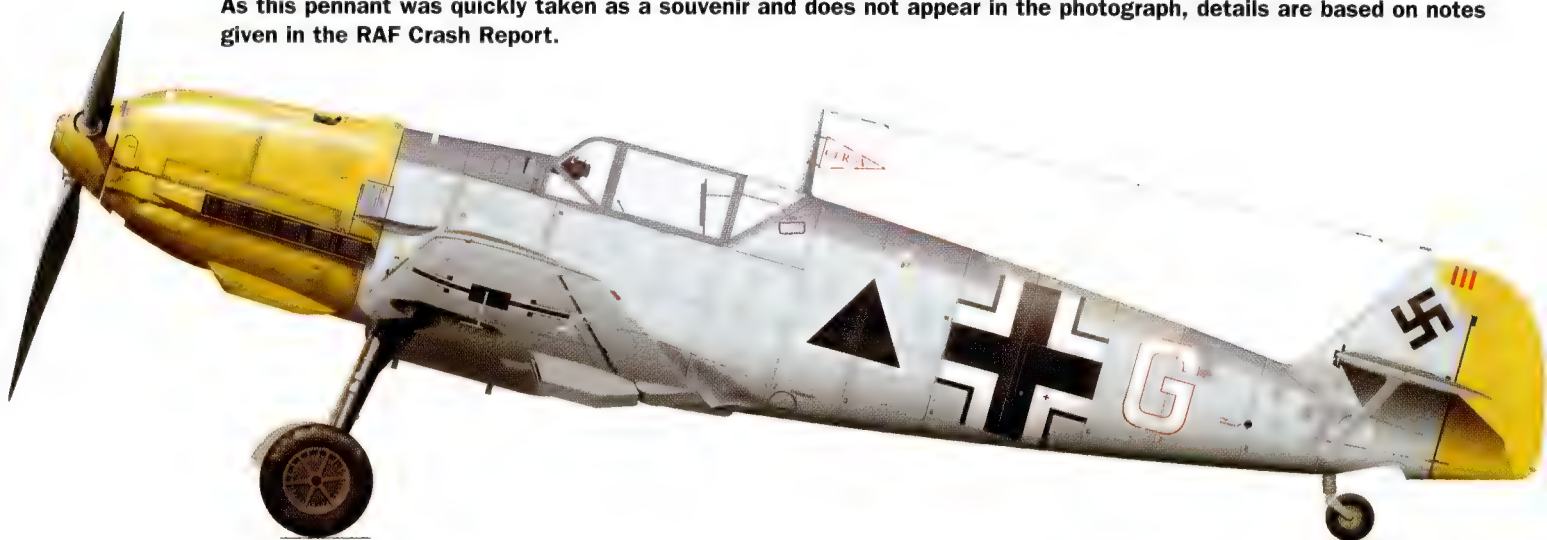


LEFT: Uffz. Paul Wacker of 2./JG 27 was on a reconnaissance sweep over England on 30 November when his engine blew a cylinder at 26,000 ft and resulted in the pilot making a forced landing on farmland at Worth Matravers, Dorset. On interrogation, Wacker explained that the machine had only recently been transferred from II.(Schlacht)/LG 2, which was why it still carried the Schlacht Gruppe's triangle and a white 'G' outlined in red, but that in due course these markings would have been painted out and the usual JG 27 numbering applied. At the time of its forced landing the aircraft had a small red and white pennant attached to the aerial mast, on which was the name 'Gerda', and there were three victory stripes on the tail.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-1/B, W.Nr. 6313, flown by Uffz. Paul Wacker of 2./JG 27, 30 November 1940

The markings on this aircraft originally led RAF Intelligence personnel to believe that Uffz. Wacker was attempting to deceive them by giving his unit as JG 27. However, it was subsequently determined that the aircraft had recently been on the strength of II.(Schlacht)/LG 2 and the markings had yet to be changed. The three victory bars on the tail therefore recorded the success of the original LG 2 pilot. The camouflage is believed to have consisted of 02 and a locally mixed grey and, when shot down, a triangular pennant was attached to the radio mast, as shown in the profile. As this pennant was quickly taken as a souvenir and does not appear in the photograph, details are based on notes given in the RAF Crash Report.



In the Bleak Mid-Winter

"During a six-week period, all of the pilots in the Staffel except my deputy and myself were lost. We started the French campaign with 12 pilots but the last sorties were flown by only two or three pilots. Now I had only Lt. Kitzinger and Fw. Knippscheer, and on the last mission, Knippscheer was shot down. Later, Kitzinger and I transferred to Jever. The base commander, an Oberstleutnant, greeted me and told me to bring in my Staffel. I pointed to Lt. Kitzinger, who was standing in the doorway, and said, 'This is my Staffel!'"

Oblt. Hans Schmoller-Haldy, Staffelkapitän of 3./JG 54

With the coming of daylight on the morning of 1 December, the fighters and *Jabos* were again over Kent and Sussex and a *Jabo* attack was made against the airfield at Kenley. From mid-morning until late afternoon a number of battles were fought above the south-eastern counties resulting in three Bf 109s being lost with a further two damaged.

On 2 December, despite low cloud and poor visibility, fighter sweeps were the order of the day and eight missions were mounted. A small formation of escorted Bf 109s bombed London, and JG 51 and JG 52 carried out *freie Jagd* sweeps over the Straits of Dover and eastern Kent. During the combats which developed, Lt. Siegfried Fischer of 1./JG 53 was killed when his Bf 109 E-4 'White 8' crashed into Chichester Harbour and *Fhr.* Wolfgang Hauße, also of 1./JG 53, was forced to ditch his damaged fighter in the Channel from where he was subsequently rescued by the *Seenotdienst*. To the south-west, additional *freie Jagd* sorties were flown over the Weymouth and Poole areas.

Low cloud, poor visibility and rain across much of southern England throughout the daylight hours of the 3rd and 4th severely hampered operations and there were no single-engined fighter combat casualties. On the morning of the 5th, clearing weather over southern England saw the resumption of German fighter sweeps over Kent with the first victory of the day going to JG 51 which downed a 249 Sqn. Hurricane for no loss. During the afternoon, six Bf 109 *Jabos* from II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2, escorted by 31 Bf 109s from *Stab* and I./JG 26 attempted an attack on Hawkinge airfield but were intercepted by three RAF squadrons. The result was the loss of one Spitfire for one Bf 109 of 1./JG 26 shot down into the Channel, killing the pilot, Lt. Hans Heinemann. Some of the *Jabos* managed to bomb Hawkinge while others released their bombs against shipping off Folkestone. Harassed by patrolling Spitfires, two Bf 109s were lost, one flown by the *Staffelkapitän* of 4.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2, *Oblt.* Heinz Vögeler, who was posted missing. Although a further three fighters were claimed by JG 26, there were no additional British fighters lost.

Adverse weather for the next five days affected daylight operations by both sides, reducing the number of fighter sweeps carried out and restricting *Jabo* activity to small-scale attacks. In JG 26, *Obstlt.* Galland was granted permission to give the entire *Geschwader* a rest and, from 7 December the first members of the *Geschwader* went on leave, the flying personnel recuperating in the Voralberg in Austria while the ground personnel were given leave in Germany. Meanwhile, the aircraft were overhauled at the *Geschwader's* home bases at Düsseldorf and Krefeld.

On the 11th, a small operation against London was broken off due to the weather but other targets, including the oil depot at Port Victoria, were attacked. The only fighter engagement of note took place shortly after 11.00 hrs when II.(*Schlacht*)/LG 2 was intercepted over Badlesmere by Spitfires of 66 Sqn. and Lt. Viktor Kraft was shot down. In an afternoon attack by nine *Jabos* against waterborne targets, one small ship was sunk and another left listing heavily.

Another break in the steadily deteriorating December weather saw several *freie Jagd* sorties mounted around noon on the 12th when JG 26, providing fighter escort for its own *Jabos*, attacked London. Intercepted by four squadrons of RAF fighters, a number of small battles developed and Fw. Rudolf Lindemann of 7./JG 26 was shot down over Kent and became a PoW. Lindemann's aircraft was the last Bf 109 to come down on British soil until February and, coincidentally, this was also the last *Jabo* mission carried out against land targets until the arrival of better weather in the new year.

On 21 December 1940, Adolf Hitler and his personal staff boarded the Führer's special train for a tour of the western front in order to inspect gun batteries on the Channel coast and spend the Christmas holiday with the aircrew of the bomber and fighter units. Christmas Day was spent with JG 26 and Hitler is seen here at the Château Bonance in Abbeville in conversation with *Obstlt.* Galland and *Hptm.* Schöpfung. Much to the annoyance of the British Foreign Office, which had made preparations to exploit Luftwaffe bombing during the Christmas period for its propaganda value, Hitler suspended all such missions against Britain from the 24th to 26th December.



December 1940



LEFT, ABOVE AND RIGHT: Hptm. Heinz Bretznütz, Kommandeur of II./JG 53, (RIGHT) scored his 27th victory on 1 December and his aircraft is seen here (LEFT AND ABOVE) with an interesting rudder marking. Twenty of the victory bars have been enclosed in a black border, perhaps to indicate that it was these which earlier earned him the Ritterkreuz, awarded on 20 October 1940.



BELOW: Bf 109 Es of III./JG 77 photographed at Cherbourg-West in late January 1941, at which time ice and snow made flying operations more dangerous. In the right background, 'Black 11' has a large wavy III. Gruppe symbol aft of the Balkenkreuz.



LEFT: Hptm. Hubertus von Bonin, the Kommandeur of I./JG 54 returns from a mission, late 1940. Under the cockpit is the badge of 3.J/88 which von Bonin had led in Spain and retained as a personal emblem. He later commanded III./JG 52 and in July 1943 became Kommodore of JG 54.



ABOVE: Major Günther von Maltzahn - seen here in the cockpit of his aircraft - first joined the German cavalry as a member of Reiter Regiment 16 in 1931. He volunteered for the Luftwaffe on its formation and was accepted in 1935. On 9 October 1940, just eight days before his 30th birthday, von Maltzahn replaced Obstlt. Hans-Jürgen von Cramon-Taubadel as Kommodore of JG 53. On 1 December Major von Maltzahn shot down his 12th victim, a Hurricane, and more in recognition for his leadership as Kommodore of JG 53 than for his victories, was awarded the Ritterkreuz on 30 December.



ABOVE: Major Günther von Maltzahn with several of his pilots. From the left, Major von Maltzahn; Hptm. Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke, Kommandeur of III./JG 53; Oblt. Kurt Brändle, Staffelfkapitän of 5./JG 53; Hptm Heinz Bretnütz, Kommandeur of II./JG 53; Ofw. Stefan Litjens of 4./JG 53 and Oblt. Franz Götz, Staffelfkapitän of 9./JG 53. All these pilots would eventually be awarded the Ritterkreuz and some the higher grades, e.g. von Maltzahn and Brändle received the Oak Leaves and Wilcke the Swords.



RIGHT: Bf 109 E-4 of the Stabsschwarm/JG 26 photographed at Abbeville on 23 December 1940. The pilot climbing from the cockpit is Fw. Bruno Hagener and his colourful machine has a yellow nose and a white spinner with black-green backplate and light green cap.

December 1940

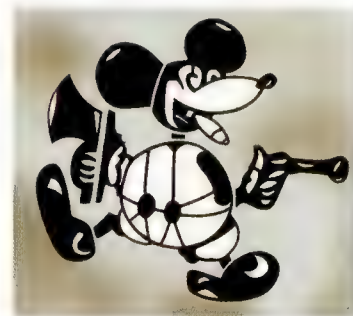


ABOVE LEFT, RIGHT AND BELOW: Various views of Obstlt. Galland's Bf 109 E-4/N complete with 'Mickey Mouse' emblem. From photographic evidence it appears that this emblem did not reappear on Galland's aircraft until mid-December. In the unusual view (*RIGHT*), the seldom seen starboard side of the fuselage shows that the emblem was not handed but faced forward on this side and aft on the port side.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4/N, W.Nr. 5819, flown by Obstlt. Adolf Galland, Kommodore of JG 26, December 1940

On 5 December 1940, Obstlt. Galland claimed his 58th victory, a 64 Sqn. Spitfire, over the Dungeness-Dover area. Galland had earlier flown this machine for some time without his 'Mickey Mouse' emblem but this had been re-applied by mid-December. At the same time, the camouflage finish on the fuselage was darkened and the machine was fitted with a yellow, capped spinner. A photograph of this machine taken on 23 December 1940, appears in Volume 2, Section 2, Page 116.



**Adolf Galland's
personal emblem**



Countering the RAF Daylight Bombing Offensive

“Several months of favourable weather has helped the Tommies. At first, we used to get right through to London before meeting any fighter opposition and then we might meet perhaps a couple. Then we could not fly for a while because there was too much mist and conditions were not right. When we did fly again there were more and more until soon there seemed to be masses of them. Times have changed.”

Oblt. Joachim Müncheberg, Staffelführer of 7./JG 26, on the increasing strength of RAF Fighter Command, January 1941.

During January 1941, clouds darkened the English Channel and every day depressions arrived from the Atlantic bringing a grey, gloomy sky with showers of rain and snow. Such daylight fighter sorties that were mounted were mostly confined to *Jagdwaiffe* patrols over the Channel. In mid-January, units of the Belgium-based *CAI* began returning to Italy and the Ju 87 once more appeared, a small number undertaking trial night operations against London, Croydon and Dover. The long strain of the *Kanal Kampf* had now worn down the *Jagdflieger* to a point where flying suffered and almost all pilots were relieved when their *Jagdgeschwader* was eventually withdrawn from the front and sent to bases in Germany to undergo a complete technical overhaul, to be brought up to strength and, in some units, convert to the new Bf 109 F. Pilots, meanwhile, were given 14 to 21 days' leave.

Due to its heavy losses, III./JG 52 had already been withdrawn to Zerbst, in Germany, in the Summer of 1940. I./JG 54 was also withdrawn early and, on 27 September the *Gruppe* moved to Jever where it was subordinated to the *Stab* of *Jagdgeschwader Schumacher* for the protection of the German Bight. On 3 December, II./JG 54 withdrew to Delmenhorst where it remained until 23 January 1941. Meanwhile, III./JG 54 left Guines on 21 October and moved first to the airfields at Schipol, Katwijk, Hamstede and de Kooy in Holland until, on 4 December, this *Gruppe*, too, was transferred to Dortmund to rest. In mid-January 1941, *Stab*, II. and III./JG 54 moved back to France, transferring to Le Mans with detachments at Cherbourg to replace other units leaving Normandy to be rested. For two months II. and III./JG 54 then defended Normandy against RAF incursions until ordered to prepare for operations in the Balkans.

On 3 December, I./JG 27 was withdrawn to Döberitz, near Berlin, where it remained until February, when it began to prepare for operations in the Mediterranean. In the same month, JG 51 transferred to Mannheim and Gütersloh where I. and IV./JG 51 took delivery of Bf 109 F-1 and F-2 aircraft.

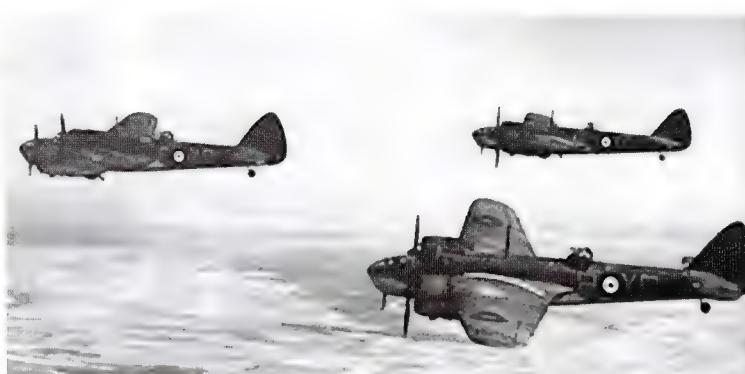
Meanwhile the RAF had been rebuilding and increasing its forces and had begun offensive daylight action over France. The first 'Rhubarb' operation – a low-level nuisance raid over the European coast to attack targets of opportunity – was made by a pair of Spitfires on 20 December. Other offensive actions were in the form of sweeps by larger numbers of fighters. Known as 'Rodeos', the first was carried out along the coast near Calais by five squadrons of Spitfires and Hurricanes on 9 January but drew no response.

As with the *Luftwaiffe's freie Jagd* sweeps over England, RAF fighters alone posed no material threat and the *Jagdwaiffe* chose to ignore them. Therefore, in order to lure the German fighters into combat, small numbers of bombers were included to attack targets which the *Luftwaiffe* would have to defend. The first such escorted light bomber strike, or 'Circus', was carried out on 10 January when two future holders of the Knight's Cross from JG 3, *Hptm.* Hans von Hahn and *Oblt.* Georg Michalek, each claimed kills although the only loss was a 249 Sqn. Hurricane from the fighter escort flown by P/O W. McConnell, who was rescued from the sea near Dover. As with the *Luftwaiffe* in 1940, the RAF soon discovered that effective bomber protection was not a simple matter and required an extraordinary number of escort fighters ('Ramrods'). As the year wore on, these operations became larger and sometimes as many as 15 squadrons of fighters would be over France as part of an operation which resulted in perhaps a dozen Blenheims dropping a modest load on a power station.

The RAF now suffered all the disadvantages that had beset the *Luftwaiffe* during 1940, operating at maximum range over hostile territory with a long over-water flight each way. During the battles over England, RAF pilots safely baling out had been immediately available for another mission, whereas German pilots were lost to the *Luftwaiffe*. Now the situation was reversed and a large number of German pilots could be saved.

On 1 February, *Stab/JG 52* arrived at Berck-sur-Mer where it was briefly joined by *II./JG 52* arriving from Bergen/Alkmaar. A few days later, on 10 February, *II./JG 52* moved to Maldegem and on the 20th, *I./JG 52* transferred from Katwijk to Woensdrecht and Vlissingen. At about this time, the bulk of *JG 26* returned to Germany, completing the move begun in December. *JG 26* (less *Obt.* Joachim Müncheberg's 7./*JG 26* which was later detached for operations against Malta) remained in the Rhineland until the end of March when it was ordered to airfields in Brittany to protect U-boat bases and German naval forces, especially the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* and the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* which were then at Brest.

On 5 February, a 'Circus' to St. Omer-Wizernes airfield provoked strong resistance from the resident *JG 3*. During the air battles which developed, *JG 3* claimed eight Spitfires and six Hurricanes, three victories being awarded to *Obt.* Peter Ostholt of *III. Gruppe* which had scrambled in good time and climbed above the escort. Another five *Abschüsse* were claimed by 2. *Staffel*, the successful pilots being *Lt.* Helmut Meckel, *Ofw.* Robert Olejnik, *Fw.* Hans Ehlers and *Fw.* Ernst Heesen, all of whom would later have distinguished *Luftwaffe* careers. Another victory was claimed by *Obt.* Hans-Herbert Wulff of the *Stab I./JG 3* and a Hurricane was attributed to *Hptm.* Walter Oesau, *Kommandeur* of *III./JG 3*, as his 40th victory, earning him the Oak Leaves. True RAF losses, however, were half those claimed; four Spitfires and three Hurricanes.



Bristol Blenheim bombers from 139 Squadron. In January 1941, small formations of these aircraft, heavily escorted by fighters, opened the RAF's daylight offensive against targets in France.



LEFT AND BELOW: Between 22 January and 22 March 1941, the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* operated in the Atlantic, sinking several ships and severely threatening British supply lines. Following this operation, the ships berthed at Brest where they immediately became the targets of repeated air attacks and on 1 April 1941, *JG 26* was transferred to airfields in Brittany in order to provide protection. Nevertheless, the ships suffered damage which kept them non-operational until late 1941. These photographs show *Gneisenau* (**LEFT**) in dry dock heavily draped in camouflage netting and *Scharnhorst* (**BELOW LEFT**). On 1 June, the two battleships were joined at Brest by the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*. (**BELOW**) On 11 February 1942, all three ships began a daring and successful dash through the English Channel to Norway.



January-June 1941



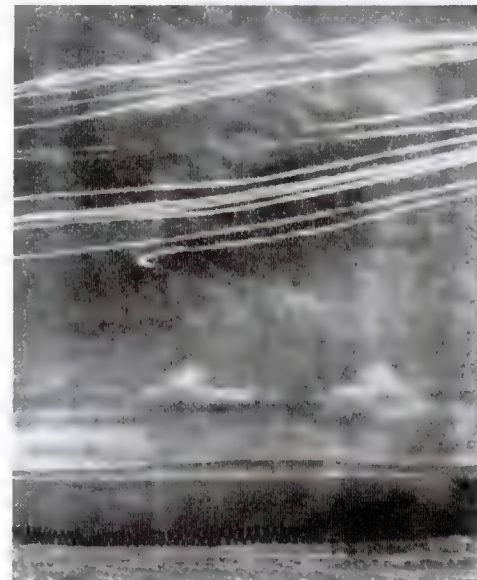
ABOVE: On 8 February 1941, II.(Schlacht)/LG 2 mounted an attack against Hawkinge aerodrome. One of the aircraft was flown by Lt. Werner Schlather whose machine appeared suddenly over Hawkinge at quite low altitude, dropped a number of 50 kg bombs and machine-gunned parked aircraft. An anti-aircraft battery opened fire and claimed that the aircraft was hit by splinters from a 3 inch shell. Lt. Schlather's aircraft caught fire, crashed in flames and disintegrated at Arpinge Farm, Newington, one mile west of Hawkinge aerodrome. The markings on the aircraft depicted in this photograph, dated November 1940, correspond with those on Schlather's W.Nr. 6410 and might well therefore be the aircraft in which he met his death. The spinner was red and the fuselage markings black edged in white.

The slowly improving weather and lengthening hours of daylight brought an increase in the amount of *Luftwaffe* activity as German fighters sought to dominate the Channel and the south-east corner of England. *Jagd* patrols over England normally made landfall at Dungeness, circled northward to Sheerness and then turned south-eastwards to leave England by way of the North Downs (see map below). These sweeps resulted in a number of engagements with defending RAF fighters which very often patrolled at around 33,000 ft, i.e. just within the condensation layer.

Shortly after midday on 14 February, I.(J)/LG 2 and II./JG 52 carried out a *freie Jagd* sweep over the Ashford-Canterbury area of south-east England and became involved in an air battle with twelve Spitfires over Dover. Although only one RAF aircraft was lost and four damaged, the German fighters claimed a total of nine Spitfires shot down, I.(J)/LG 2 claiming six, of which *Hptm.* Herbert Ihlefeld and *Lt.* Friedrich Geisshardt each claimed two, and *Major* Hanns Trübenbach, *Kommodore* of JG 52, and *Oblt.* Johannes Steinhoff, *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 52, each claimed one apiece.

It was now time for JG 3 to leave St. Omer and return to Germany to rest and refit, and on 14 February, I./JG 3 flew its last *Einsatz* before handing over its 24 Bf 109 Es to III./JG 51. Two days later, the *Kommandeur* of IV./JG 51, *Hptm.* Johannes Janke, transferred to the *Stab* of a *Nachtjagd* division, his position being taken by *Oblt.* Hans-Karl Keitel, formerly *Staffelkapitän* of 10./JG 51. A run of particularly heavy casualties for JG 51 began on 25 February when, after combat, *Fhr.* Günther Rüberr of 6./JG 51 was killed while making an emergency landing at Mardyck and *Uffz.* Wilhelm Topp, also of 6. *Staffel*,

crashed near Oyé-Plage. On the same day, 4./JG 51's *Oblt.* Giselbert Pirker was killed and *Fw.* Wilhelm Gasthaus wounded in a mid-air collision at Mardyck. The next day, Keitel's brief period as acting *Gruppenkommandeur* ended when he was posted missing in action over the Channel. He was replaced by 33-year old *Major* Friedrich Beckh, who had served with the *Luftwaffe Generalstab* until, at Mölders' behest, he joined the *Geschwaderstab* of JG 51 in October 1940. When Beckh became *Kommandeur*, he had practically no combat experience but claimed his first victory, a Spitfire, on 3 March and within a year had increased his score to 47.



On 22 February 1941 there was a high level of fighter activity over the English Channel as RAF fighters intercepted many *Luftwaffe* formations. This photograph was taken as the battle began and shows the contrails left by German fighters as they conduct a fighter sweep over the Straits of Dover. The use of a telephoto lens has brought the cliffs of France apparently closer to England.

BELOW: Schematic diagram showing the general path flown by German fighter patrols operating over England and the Channel.



Meanwhile, the *Kommodore* of JG 51, *Obstlt.* Mölders, continued to add to his score, claiming a Spitfire, believed to have been from 611 Sqn., on 25 February and on the 26th he claimed his 60th victory. Also on 26 February, *Hptm.* Hermann-Friedrich Joppien of I./JG 51 claimed two Hurricanes over the Ashford-Dungeness area and *Hptm.* Herbert Ihlefeld of I.(J)/LG 2 claimed his 30th, a 54 Sqn. Spitfire over France flown by Sgt. Howard Squire who was made a PoW.

Whereas the earlier British fighter sweeps had posed no threat, *Luftwaffe* headquarters in Berlin and Paris now demanded that the more damaging RAF bomber attacks against railway, airfield or industrial targets in France had to be stopped. By this time, *Jafü* 2 at Le Touquet had radar at his disposal and the German Listening Service was also functioning so that timely notice could be given of the approach of British formations. The fighter *Geschwader* therefore adopted the alarm start system, scrambling and taking off against each British mission as warning, weather and time permitted. This system worked well enough but the defenders were unable to determine before taking off what sort of raid was approaching. As the number of British fighter sweeps increased, the *Luftwaffe* introduced patrols by two or three fighters. In exactly the same way as the RAF had earlier formed its 'Spotting Flights', their task was to examine and report the strength and composition of the British formations. Only if bomber formations were present in some strength would large numbers of fighters be sent up. If there were no bombers, the German fighters would not take off on account of their numerical inferiority.

Meanwhile, during the Autumn and Winter of 1940, JG 53 had been withdrawn to Mannheim-Sandhofen and the flying personnel had been skiing in the mountains as a rest cure. In the first three months of 1941, the whole of JG 53, with the exception of the *Ergänzungsstaffel*, was re-equipped with the new Bf 109 F but, as with most other units, no real training was given on the new aircraft as all pilots were fully experienced and quickly got the feel of their new machines. In early March, JG 53 began returning to France, I. *Gruppe* moving to Abbeville, II. *Gruppe* to St. Omer-Arques and III. *Gruppe* to Berck-sur-Mer. The *Geschwader's* first operational sorties of the Spring were flown on 18 March when the *Geschwaderstab* mounted an uneventful patrol. The next day, *Major* Günther von Maltzahn, the *Kommodore* of JG 53, claimed a Spitfire as his 28th victory but this aircraft was probably the one also credited to *Hptm.* Heinz Bretnütz, *Kommandeur* of II./JG 53, as his 27th kill. In fact, the aircraft awarded to Bretnütz was crash-landed at Hailsham by its wounded pilot, Sgt. Hale of 610 Sqn., and although severely damaged, was probably later repaired. More positively, two Hurricanes claimed by *Hptm.* Ihlefeld of I.(J)/LG 2 in the late afternoon can be identified as those lost by 1 Sqn. On the afternoon of the 24th the *Stabsschwarm* was again in action with Spitfires and Hurricanes.

In Germany, I./JG 3 began to receive its first Bf 109 Fs towards the end of March and received orders to prepare to transfer back to the *Kanal*. Ground elements of I./JG 3 moved to St. Pol, arriving on 21 April, but due to bad weather, the transfer of the flying elements was delayed until 5 May when 25 Bf 109s under *Hptm.* Hans von Hahn flew to St Pol. II. *Gruppe* did not complete its move to Monchy-Breton until 4 May.

Meanwhile, III./JG 53 had moved to St. Brioux to patrol the coast and guard Brest, and during a late morning mission on 31 March, *Major* von Maltzahn of JG 53 was credited with a Spitfire. This was claimed as his 13th victory but, apparently, there were no Fighter Command casualties on this date. During late March and early April, I.(J)/LG 2, JG 27, *Stab*, II. and III./JG 54 and *Stab*, II. and III./JG 77 left the Channel Front and began to prepare for operations in the Balkans.

Personal victory scores continued to increase during this period and included *Obstlt.* Galland, *Kommodore* of JG 26, and his wingman, *Ofw.* Robert Menge, who each claimed a Spitfire on 4 April. On the 6th, II./JG 2 claimed three Blenheims, one being awarded to the *Kommandeur*, *Hptm.* Karl-Heinz Greisert; and on the 15th, *Obstlt.* Galland claimed three more Spitfires and *Obstlt.* Mölders one, so bringing both scores to 63 each. On 21 April, I./JG 2 claimed a Spitfire and a Blenheim, the latter being *Lt.* Erich Rudorffer's 20th victory, for which he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* on 1 May, shortly before he transferred to join II./JG 2.

Based at Oostende-Middelkerke on the Belgian coast, 2./JG 52 carried out a number of flights over England during April. The aircraft usually flew alone or in pairs, sometimes carrying bombs, this *Staffel* having been taught to drop bombs during a three-day training course at

This photograph, taken during the Summer or Autumn of 1940, shows an injured German airman receiving help after his parachute only partly opened when he baled out over England. During the Battle of Britain, there was a surprising number of incidents in which German parachutes did not open properly or failed completely. *Lt.* Martin Ottmer of 3./JG 51 was killed in such circumstances in the afternoon of 3 March 1941 when he abandoned his Bf 109 E-7 during a dogfight over the Kent coast and his parachute failed to open. His aircraft, W.Nr. 2035, buried itself in the ground at Brenzett, near Rye.



Krefeld. On the morning of 24 April, *Fw.* Günther Struck and *Fw.* Grassmann, were detailed to bomb an aerodrome in Kent. As Struck's own aircraft, W.Nr. 2319 coded '10' was out of action, he took an alternative machine coded '2' and the two aircraft took off and flew together at about 2,000 ft to Calais, Cap Gris-Nez and then north to cross the coast at Hythe. Soon afterwards, the two aircraft became separated in cloud and lost contact with each other. Struck searched for about 30 minutes trying to find a target and finally released his bomb on what he believed was an aerodrome near Rye. In fact, his bomb exploded harmlessly in open ground near Rye railway station. Struck then hid in clouds and emerged to find two Spitfires on his tail. Soon he felt bullets striking the armour protecting his head and back and at the same time his radiator, engine and oil feed were hit. Engaged also by AA fire, Struck baled out, leaving his aircraft to crash into the ground at high speed where it was completely destroyed and burned out.

The increasing amount of daylight brought a further steady proliferation in the number of *Luftwaffe* fighter and *Jabo* incursions over England and on 26 April, II./JG 52, escorted by III./JG 53, carried out a *Jabo* attack on the RAF airfields at Lympne and Hawkinge. The same day, I./JG 53 engaged Spitfires, Lt. Wolfgang Tonne of 3./JG 53 claiming one which was to prove the *Gruppe's* only victory during its time on the *Kanal* in the Spring of 1941. On 29 April, *Oblt.* Werner Machold, *Staffelkapitän* of the fighter-bomber *Staffel* 7./JG 2, claimed two Spitfires near Eastbourne.

By this time, III./JG 3 was due to return to the front and on 3 May, ground elements of III./JG 3 began to transfer to Lillers, some 40 km west of Lille. Flying elements followed two days later and were based on the airfield at Auchy-au-Bois, 5 km west of Lillers.

On 7 May, the *Jagdflieger* were in action against British fighters on the French coast and also against fighters escorting a convoy, German pilots claiming nine victories. Five of these were claimed by JG 53, with *Fw.* Josef Wurmheller claiming his 9th and 10th victories, and *Oblt.* Franz Götz his 11th. *Oblt.* Gordon Gollob, the *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 3 also claimed a Spitfire as his sixth victory and was lightly wounded in the process.

I. and II./JG 3 mounted an offensive patrol to the south coast of England on 8 May, while 1. and 3./JG 3 attacked airfields. Hawkinge was machine-gunned by three Bf 109s, while at Lympne three more Bf 109s carried out an eight-second strafing attack, neither of which had any effect. *Fw.* Gerhard Grundmann and Lt. Karlheinz Ponec were both shot down during these missions and landed in the Channel. The *Seenotdienst* was informed, but in view of the RAF's practice of attacking air-sea rescue aircraft, JG 3 provided a heavy escort. 1./JG 3 was patrolling the English coast and became involved in a fight with a number of British aircraft. Lt. Günther Pöpel baled out with only slight injuries when his Bf 109 F, marked with three black chevrons outlined in white, broke up in the air after it was hit by Hurricanes of 302 Sqn. It was the first Bf 109 F to fall on British soil but was completely wrecked and scattered over a wide area near Tenterden, in Kent. Also lost in this action was Lt. Joachim Pfeiffer of 4. *Staffel* who was posted missing, and several Bf 109s were also damaged. Of the original downed pilots, Grundmann was reported missing and only Ponec was rescued.

On the 9th May, JG 53 claimed a Spitfire shot down but lost a Bf 109 F-2 from *Stab*/JG 53 over Ashford. The pilot of this aircraft, Lt. Julius Heger, had taken off from an airfield near St. Omer with three other Bf 109s to patrol Dover and the south-east of England, but shortly after crossing the coast they became engaged in a fight with a similar number of Spitfires. Heger later stated that he dived on one Spitfire but while pulling out in a climbing turn his "controls broke", and the aircraft went out of control and broke up in the air. Heger was thrown from the cockpit and landed safely by parachute. In fact, his aircraft, marked < 4 — + — in black edged white, had been hit by one of the RAF's new 20 mm cannon-armed Mk. Vb Spitfires. That afternoon, *Oblt.* Willy Stange, the *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 3 claimed a Spitfire, providing III. *Gruppe* with its first success since returning to the Channel.

This period saw more attacks on RAF airfields and on 11 and 12 May, *Stab* and I./JG 53 strafed Hawkinge. On 11 May, 2./JG 51 set out with about 16 Bf 109s each carrying a 250 kg bomb to attack Rochford airfield. After flying up the River Crouch at 12,000 ft, they carried out a diving attack against the aerodrome. *Uffz.* Alfred Ludwig's Bf 109 F-1/B was hit at a height of 300-400 ft by the ground defences and immediately crashed into the ground leaving the pilot no time to escape. Little of his aircraft was found, but examination revealed black staff markings outlined in white and an orange spinner and engine cowling. Lympne airfield was machine-gunned by 12 Bf 109s, five of which also dropped bombs, in a five-minute attack which caused no damage. Elsewhere, JG 2 claimed three Spitfires off Portland, *Fw.* Karl Pfeiffer of 3./JG 2, *Uffz.* Theodor Zingerle of 8./JG 2 and Lt. Jakob Augustin of 7./JG 2 all being credited accordingly, although Fighter Command's only casualty was a solitary Hurricane of 1 Sqn. which was damaged.

On 12 May, 2./JG 3 carried out a *Jabo* attack against an airfield and two days later 6./JG 3 attacked Hawkinge. On 16 May, Lt. Erich Buchholz was slightly injured when his aircraft crashed and was destroyed taking off as part of a patrol. Later, the *Gruppe* took off again, this time to Hawkinge where they carried out strafing attacks and claimed to have shot up three aircraft on the ground. The Hawkinge Operations Records Book reveals that there were four separate attacks on this day, the first three by Bf 109s which machine-gunned the airfield but merely damaged a Hurricane. The last attack was carried out by three Bf 110s which dropped six 500 kg bombs but succeeded only in damaging four Spitfires and rendering two Miles Magisters unserviceable. During the day's operations, *Oblt.* Gerd Sprenger, the *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 3 was posted missing after being shot down by a Hurricane in his Bf 109 F-2 coded 'White 4'.

In the late afternoon of 17 May, JG 2's *Kommodore*, Major Balthasar, shot down a Spitfire over the Straits of Dover and, in the early evening of the 19th, claimed a Blenheim shot down south of the Isle of Wight. On the same day, *Oblt.* Werner Machold of 7./JG 2 claimed two Spitfires north of Weymouth. With advance elements of I. and II./JG 3 already moving to the East, I./JG 3 flew its last operation in the West when a *Schwarm* patrolled British airfields on the south coast but failed to make contact with the enemy. II./JG 3 flew its last operation on 4 June, when a *Schwarm* from the *Gruppe* escorted a German coastal convoy. The 4 June also marked the last operation flown by JG 53 when, in the late afternoon, 4. *Staffel* tangled with an incursion by Spitfires, one of which was shot down by *Ofw.* Stefan Litjens.

According to the German press, JG 26 had earlier scored its 500th victory on 1 May, but by early June the most successful *Jagdgeschwader* in the *Luftwaffe* was JG 51 with 691 victories as follows:

<i>Stab</i> :	75 (of which 43 were credited to <i>Obstlt.</i> Mölders) ⁽⁵⁾
I./JG 51	181 (of which <i>Hptm.</i> Joppien claimed 42 and Lt. Bär 17)
II./JG 51	166 (of which <i>Oblt.</i> Priller and <i>Hptm.</i> Tietzen each claimed 20 and <i>Hptm.</i> Fözo 15)
III./JG 51	172 (of which <i>Hptm.</i> Oesau claimed 39, <i>Hptm.</i> Lignitz 19 and <i>Oblt.</i> Staiger 12)
IV./JG 51	97 (of which <i>Oblt.</i> Nordmann claimed 9 and Lt. Mütterich and <i>Hptm.</i> Keitel 8 each)

The above victories had however cost the *Geschwader* a total of 147 pilots killed, missing, wounded or taken prisoner. When normal transfers to other units are also considered, very few of the *Geschwader's* original pilots remained.

As the *Luftwaffe* in the West redeployed for the planned invasion of Russia, it was confidently expected that the campaign would last six weeks at the most and the bulk of the fighter force began to transfer eastwards in order to finish the fighting within that time. I./JG 53 left Crécy on 6 June, followed two days later by the *Stab* and II./JG 53 as well as the remaining elements of JG 3. Only JG 2 and JG 26 were to remain in the West, although they were to be allowed to go to Russia for three-week periods beginning with JG 2. However, soon after the attack on Russia began, the RAF's daylight bombing offensive increased to such a pitch that the whole of JG 2 and JG 26, faced with the full burden of stopping the RAF's attacks, had to be retained in the West. Indeed, by early June, JG 26 had already been recalled from Brittany and the whole *Geschwader* moved to various airfields around Abbeville. In its place, the defence of Brest was allocated to II./JG 2 under the *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Karl-Heinz Greisert.

The *Jagdwaaffe* lost two of its more successful pilots at this time. On 9 June, *Ritterkreuzträger Oblt.* Werner Machold, the *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 2 was making a low-level attack on a convoy off Portland with a 250 kg bomb when he was apparently shot down by AA fire from the Royal Navy destroyer HMS *Blencathra* and made a good emergency landing with a seized engine. His usual machine was the 'White 1', (the subject of one of our colour profiles) but on this occasion Machold was flying an aircraft marked '15'. The RAF's Crash Report on this aircraft states that no damage from gunfire was found, but the spark plugs on one side of the engine had been blown out, supporting Machold's claim that he had been brought down by mechanical trouble and not by enemy action. Examination of the aircraft also showed that the original yellow spinner and rudder had been overpainted grey.

On 14 June, Lt. Robert Menge of 3./JG 26, the highest scoring pilot of the Norwegian campaign in 1940 and, more recently, *Obstlt.* Galland's wingman with 18 victories to his credit, was killed by Spitfire Vs while taking off from Marquise-Audembert. Two days later, during the evening of 16 June, the RAF sent

5. At this time, Mölders' personal victory score had exceeded 60, the 43 mentioned here being his contribution to the total while with the *Stab*/JG 51. The same applies to the other pilots listed, their victories being only those achieved while serving with the *Gruppe* shown.

January-June 1941

six Blenheims, heavily escorted by six squadrons of fighters, to attack Boulogne-sur-Mer. Galland claimed a Hurricane as his 64th victory while other pilots of JG 26 brought total claims to 15, though these were later adjusted to 11. True RAF fighter losses were five. Conversely, on the same day, I./JG 52 claimed two Blenheims off Texel, whereas three were shot down and a fourth crashed after colliding with the superstructure of a ship.

The next day, 23 RAF Blenheims escorted by 14 squadrons of fighters set out to attack a French chemical factory at Chocques, about 30 miles inland from the coast. No Blenheims were lost, but JG 26's pilots claimed 16 of the escort fighters with *Obstlt.* Galland and *Oblt.* Sprick claiming two each. On the same day, III./JG 2 claimed three victories, *Oblt.* Carl-Hans Rödgers, *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 2, two Hurricanes and Lt. Egon Mayer of 7. *Staffel* a Spitfire, thus making a total of 19 aircraft claimed against a true total of nine lost and one damaged.

On 21 June, the RAF carried out two 'Circus' operations each comprising just six Blenheims but accompanied by 17 fighter squadrons. The designated target for the first operation was St. Omer-Wizernes airfield and as soon as the British formation was detected, *Jafü* 2 scrambled JG 26 to intercept. The *Geschwader* claimed seven victories, *Obstlt.* Galland shooting down one Blenheim and damaging another. A Spitfire then attacked Galland from behind, inflicting damage to his aircraft which compelled him to make an emergency landing at Calais-Marck. II./JG 26 chased the attackers as they withdrew towards England and as more British aircraft appeared to cover their comrades' withdrawal,

"We saw Krause's canopy come away but..."

PETER BREMER, JG 54

I was born on 18 December 1919. After my schooldays I studied to become a bank employee and spent most of my free time piloting gliders. I was soon offered pre-military training on powered aircraft at the *NS Fliegerkorps*, which I accepted, as I had already decided that I wanted to become a fighter pilot.

During fighter pilot training at the *Jagdfliegerschule* at Wiener-Neustadt, I was involved in an accident. On a training flight, *Gefreiter* Harry Krause approached the airfield without seeing my aircraft and cut in front of me so sharply that the propeller on my aircraft severed his tail unit. Both our aircraft crashed into the ground, but we baled out successfully though I was injured and taken to hospital. We were later both court-martialed. Our flight instructor defended us as best he could, saying that *Gefr.* Krause had been momentarily distracted, that we were good student fighter pilots and that we shouldn't be blamed for being too eager.

The court-martial discussed the matter for some time and when the verdict was announced I was told that I was not responsible for the collision and was acquitted. *Gefr.* Krause was found guilty of the destruction of two *Luftwaffe* aircraft but, in a verdict reminiscent of King Solomon, the court ruled that, since we were in the middle of the war, and since *Gefr.* Krause was a promising fighter pilot, his punishment was six weeks of strict confinement - to be served *after* the war. I returned to hospital, and Krause continued his training.

A few weeks later, when I had recovered and returned to the fighter school, Krause had already finished his training and had been transferred to 2./JG 54. Two months later, in the Autumn of 1940, I met him again. We were now both in JG 54 which was stationed in Jever for the defence of the German Bight, but there were days when there were no enemy incursions at all.

On 4 June 1941, shortly after we had received our new Bf 109 F-2 aircraft, the *Staffelkapitän*, *Oberleutnant* Hein, took the entire *Staffel* in tight formation to maximum altitude. We were flying over the North Sea at 12,500 metres and dived down steeply in formation, our airspeed indicator registering the maximum, about 1,000 km/h. We had dived to about 5,000 metres when the *Kapitän* ordered us to pull out slowly. We gradually eased back on our control columns in order to bring the aircraft to a normal attitude, but one excited voice on the radio stated that his aircraft would not pull out. It was Harry Krause. The *Kapitän* told him to keep calm and to slowly and firmly pull back on his stick, but we heard Harry Krause crying, "It's not responding, it's not responding!"

At this point the *Staffelkapitän* told him to bale out. We saw Krause's canopy come away but, to our horror, saw two separate dots falling down followed more slowly by one loosely fluttering parachute. He had pulled his ripcord immediately he'd left his aircraft¹ but due to the high speed of his fall, the straps of his parachute had been torn apart and he plummeted to his death. His body was later discovered in a sand dune. Only his flight suit kept him in one piece; there was not a single bone which was not broken.

Later, an enquiry determined that, on a specific factory series of the Bf 109 F-2, the fabric on the lower area of the rudder ballooned at high diving speeds and jammed the elevators. There was, however, no court-martial to determine the question of guilt.



1. Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 W.Nr. 12690.



Lt. Robert Menge, here with his pet fox cub, was killed on 14 June 1941 when Spitfires of 92 Sqn. attacked 3./JG 26 as the Staffel climbed from Marquise-Audembert to engage a 'Circus'. In this photograph, taken shortly before his death, Menge is posing on his Bf 109 E-7 'White 1'. Beneath the cockpit are the flags of Spain, Norway, France and Great Britain, the countries against which Menge fought and, barely visible, the Staffel badge comprising a diving eagle clutching a bomb.

the battle continued across the Channel and into Kent. Meanwhile, *Oblt.* Walter Schneider, the *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 26 led 11 of his *Staffel*'s pilots off from Maldegem to engage ten Spitfires which had made a sweep over Belgium. Split up in cloud, some aircraft flew closer to England than had been intended and were attacked by Spitfires. When one attack put *Uffz.* Otto Ewald's engine out of action, he baled out and came down in the sea, being supported for five hours by his *Schwimmweste* before he was picked up, wounded, 14 miles east of Ramsgate and taken prisoner. When rescued, he was naked except for his life jacket. The combat with the Spitfires forced other aircraft over land, and *Oblt.* Franz Lüders' Bf 109 E-7, 'Brown 2' was attacked first from behind

and below and then from his starboard side. Hit in the fuselage and wings and with his engine put out of action, Lüders baled out at 3,000 ft and the aircraft crashed onto a railway line at Bridge, near Canterbury, where it exploded and burned out.

The RAF's second 'Circus' of the day was directed at the airfield at Desvres and was reported at around 16.00 hrs. II./JG 2 and I. and III./JG 26 were scrambled and attacked as the bombers were on their way home. Having returned to his airfield, Galland took off and shot down a Spitfire of 616 Sqn. over Boulogne-sur-Mer but he was then attacked by a Spitfire which shot up his radiator and fuel tank. Galland glided back towards his airfield but his aircraft's fuel tank exploded and he baled out. Upon landing, he was informed that he was the first recipient of the Swords. Meanwhile, II./JG 2 had entered the fray, claiming 11 aircraft from the fighter escort including *Ofw.* Kurt Bühligen of 4./JG 2, who claimed three Spitfires, the *Gruppenkommandeur*, *Hptm.* Karl-Heinz Greisert, who claimed one Spitfire and *Oblt.* Siegfried Schnell of 4./JG 2 who claimed two Spitfires. The 5. *Staffel*'s *Oblt.* Helmut-Felix Bolz claimed a Hurricane and *Lt.* Martin Brachmann a Spitfire.

Barbarossa, the attack on Russia, opened on 22 June. Almost immediately the RAF greatly increased its offensive efforts in an attempt to assist the Russians by drawing back *Luftwaffe* strength from the East. The net effect was a marked increase in cross-Channel activity and on this day JG 2's *Major* Balthasar claimed two Blenheims. The reader will already have noted that in a number of instances German victory claims exceeded true RAF losses and in this action too, *Oblt.* Schnell, *Oblt.* Pflanz, *Oblt.* Leie, and *Hptm.* Greisert claimed five Spitfires between them, but amazingly, only one, a 609 Sqn. aircraft was lost on the 22nd. It should also be mentioned that the RAF was regularly overclaiming but to an even greater degree, and on the 22nd, the RAF claimed 29 German aircraft destroyed against a true total of three.

The RAF mounted two 'Circuses' on 23 June, one to attack the chemical factory at Choques and the second to bomb the airfield at Mardick. In the first raid, five *Gruppen* from JG 2 and JG 26 were scrambled, but only I./JG 26 made contact and shot down two Spitfires. In the second attack, scheduled for the late evening, the RAF experienced one of the same missed rendezvous which the *Luftwaffe* had suffered in 1940. On this occasion, the bombers were early and the escort failed to catch up, so that when the bombers ran into the first *Luftwaffe* fighter attacks, they released their bombs early and turned for home. Within ten minutes, five Blenheims were shot down, the successful pilots including *Oblt.* Siegfried Schnell of 4./JG 2 who claimed a Spitfire at 20.19 hrs, quickly followed by two Blenheims. The arrival of the RAF escort brought the German fighters under attack and of the five Spitfires claimed destroyed, *Major* Wilhelm Balthasar was credited with two, 4./JG 2's *Oblt.* Hans-Jürgen Heppel with two and *Lt.* Hans Gerlach with one. Sometime during the day, *Oblt.* Carl-Hans Röders, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 2, was lost in Bf 109 F-2 'Brown 1', his body being retrieved on the 27th.

An evening 'Circus' to Comines on 24 June was detected at 19.46 hrs and was first engaged over the French coast at Gravelines by JG 26 which claimed three Spitfires. As the British aircraft re-crossed the coast on their way home, they were attacked by JG 2 and a running fight developed over the Channel from Calais to Ramsgate. *Stab.* II. and III./JG 2 claimed a total of ten Spitfires shot down against a true RAF loss of two. JG 2 also lost two pilots, including *Lt.* Heinz Bolze, the *Gruppenadjutant* of II./JG 2, who was shot down and killed by fighters 18 km SE Calais.

On the 25th, the first 'Circus' targeted Hazebrouck, and around noon a prolonged battle developed over the coast in which I./JG 26 claimed three Spitfires. JG 2 was also in action and claimed six Spitfires for the loss of two aircraft and one pilot, the first two victories being claimed by *Oblt.* Siegfried Schnell and *Uffz.* Willi Morzinek, both of 4./JG 2. In the *Stab* flight, *Oblt.* Pflanz, *Fw.* Günther Seeger and *Major* Balthasar all claimed a Spitfire each, as did *Lt.* Christian von Schlieffen of 7./JG 2. Against the nine aircraft claimed, the RAF lost two with three badly damaged. In the late afternoon, another 'Circus' set out to bomb St.Omer-Wizernes. Both JG 2 and JG 26 had standing patrols airborne and at 16.30 hrs, *Oblt.* Leie of *Stab*/JG 2 claimed a Spitfire, quickly followed by *Hptm.* 'Assi' Hahn of III. *Gruppe* who claimed another and *Lt.* Egon Mayer of 7./JG 2 who claimed two. *Lt.* Johannes Schmidt of 3./JG 26 and *Oblt.* Walter Schneider, the *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 26 also claimed a Spitfire each. Thus total claims by JG 2 and JG 26 in the second engagement totalled 12 against true RAF losses of four.

The target for the 'Circus' on 26 June was again the power station at Comines. Twenty-three Blenheims took part, but they failed to reach the target and although *Stabsfeldwebel* Erwin Kley of 1./JG 2 claimed one Blenheim, none was lost. The II./JG 26 claimed two Spitfires, one by the *Kommandeur*, *Hptm.* Walter Adolph, and although three other pilots claimed a Spitfire each, only one Spitfire was lost in connection with the 'Circus'. On this day, JG 2's losses exceeded their claims, two pilots being killed in action with another severely wounded, while five Bf 109 Fs were lost including two which were severely damaged in emergency landings near Merville.

The 27 June developed into a busy day for the Channel defenders, the RAF mounting three 'Rodeos' and a 'Roadstead' anti-shipping operation in addition to the usual 'Circus'. In the late afternoon, *Oblt.* Kurt Ebersberger, *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 26, and *Hptm.* Gerhard Schöpfel, *Kommandeur* of III./JG 26 each made claims against British fighters, but the main action began in the late evening when elements of JG 2 and JG 26 engaged Blenheims and their fighter escort as the day's 'Circus' made its way home. In the Lille-Gravelines area, *Oblt.* Siegfried Schnell and *Major* Wilhelm Balthasar claimed two Spitfires each, while *Hptm.* Rolf Pingel's I./JG 26 attacked the formation from the target area to the coast, claiming four Spitfires without loss.

On 28 June, the RAF carried out another attack on the power station at Comines, during which I./JG 26 made contact with the 'Circus' west of Lille, followed by 8. and 9. *Staffeln* of III. *Gruppe* as the bombers headed home. In this latter engagement, *Oblt.* Harald Grawatsch, *Gruppenadjutant* of II./JG 26 was shot down in flames by a Spitfire. He baled out with a leg so badly injured that it was later amputated. *Oblt.* Sprick, *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 26, was killed when one wing of his F-2 'Black 4' W.Nr. 5743 collapsed during combat. On the last day of June, the RAF sent 18 Blenheims with fighter escort to bomb the power station at Pont-à-Verdin. There were no Fighter Command losses, but two pilots from 3./JG 2 each claimed a Spitfire and the *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 26, *Oblt.* Priller, was awarded another.

By this time, the combat use of the Bf 109 F had revealed problems with the aircraft's structure. In at least one instance, the fabric of the tail surfaces ballooned when the aircraft dived at speed, locking the controls, and a number of the early F-0s had been lost and pilots killed when the entire tail unit broke away from the fuselage. In both cases, modifications were introduced to solve the problems, but when aircraft began returning from combat with ripples in the metal skinning of their wings, the appropriate authorities did not consider this warranted further investigation. Only following the death of *Oblt.* Sprick was the problem investigated, examination revealing the existence of weak areas in the wing structure. These areas were subsequently modified to strengthen them until a redesigned wing became available.

Regardless of the risks associated with over stressing the airframe in steep dives or in violent combat manoeuvres, pilots who had converted to the Bf 109 F were almost unanimous in viewing it as a marked

Oblt. Gustav Sprick, *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 26, was killed on 28 June 1941 when his aircraft lost a wing during an air battle. He had 31 victories. A subsequent investigation revealed a weakness in the structure of the wing.





The Spitfire V entered service with the RAF during the first months of 1941 and was soon on the offensive over France, flying fighter sweeps and providing escort cover for Blenheim and Stirling bombers.

improvement over the earlier E variants. There were few unfavourable comments on the reduction in the armament which was generally considered ideal, and the standard MG 151, with its considerably increased rate of fire, was well liked once pilots had learned to aim high. The aircraft's endurance was almost identical to the Bf 109 E-7 but its performance was superior and it was claimed that, after pulling out of a dive, a good pilot could perform four complete rolls on the climb before having to level off. The aircraft's normal climbing performance also gave German fighter pilots much more confidence as, while the standard evasive half roll and steep dive was still practised, this had obvious disadvantages in that it either resulted in the engagement being broken off or, alternatively, the loss of height placed the Bf 109 pilot in a tactically unfavourable position. With the Bf 109 F, however, pilots could disengage from British fighters by climbing away, particularly at heights above 2,500 ft, and re-engage from a tactically advantageous position. Circling tactics were still avoided as the British fighters, particularly the new Spitfire Mk. V, might, when handled by an equally good pilot, still be superior in steep, fast turns, and *Hptm.* Rolf Pingel, *Kommandeur* of I./JG 26, was suitably impressed with the Spitfire V when on one occasion he saw a Bf 109 explode in mid-air over St. Omer after being hit by a single burst of fire.

As for the British fighter pilots, they were highly and sincerely praised by their German counterparts who especially admired the efforts of the fighter escorts which screened the bombers so efficiently that German pilots found the only way they could penetrate to the bombers was to approach from above and behind and dive through the formation at full throttle. One way or another, the indications were that the *Jagdwaaffe* left holding the West could expect an eventful Summer.

A Final Word on the Battle of Britain

"The Battle of Britain is not as significant in German eyes as with the British. To us the battle was just a normal method of waging the air war, but the British have turned these events into the most significant phase of the war. What was significant to us was the bombing of British factories and fighter bases and to combat the RAF in the air. Hitler's nonsensical order to bomb London was decisive. By shifting the bombing from the war-supporting targets to London, Hitler gave the RAF time to re-equip and reorganise so that more aircraft could be produced and their damaged air bases could be repaired. This resulted in a new and strong defence which we were no longer in a position to overcome. If we talk about who won or who lost the Battle of Britain, from the German point of view the battle was lost when we bombed London. Whether Churchill decided to bomb Berlin solely for the purpose of goading Hitler into bombing London is another question, but if he made this decision to divert the Luftwaaffe from attacking the RAF, it was brilliant. Incidentally, it was the British who started the bombing of civilians and cities whereas we bombed military targets and factories which made the implements of war. Even Coventry falls into this classification."

January 1941

LEFT: At the end of November, III./JG 27 was withdrawn to Bad Zwischenhahn to rest. This 'Black 7', photographed at the end of 1940, belonged to 8./JG 27, commanded at that time by Oblt. Arno Becker who had taken over the Staffel on 27 October 1940.



8./JG 27 emblem



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-3 'Black 7' of 8./JG 27, Bad Zwischenhahn, late 1940

This machine was observed in Germany at the end of 1940 as elements of JG 27 were withdrawn to rest. The fuselage is camouflaged in a standard high-demarcation 02/71 finish but, somewhat unusually considering the period this machine was observed, the fuselage sides remain in plain 65 with no mottling. Below the windscreen was a painted shield showing an Iron Cross First Class rising from the sea. It is believed this was the Staffel badge of 8./JG 27 before the unit adopted a later design featuring a black hand on a white disc.

RIGHT: A yellow-nosed Bf 109 E-7 of I./JG 3 photographed at a snow-covered Clairmarais/St. Omer during the winter of 1940/41. The camouflage is unusual in that the high-demarcation 02/71 upper finish has been enhanced with diagonal stripes. The spinner has a white segment and the spinner cap appears to be halved in red and white. Although the exact identity of this machine remains unknown, the 'Tatzelwurm' on the nose is believed to be in the Stab colour of green. The centreline ETC beneath the fuselage was a feature of the E-7.



January 1941



Photographed at Aalborg, in Norway, in August 1940, (ABOVE LEFT) 'Black 3' of 5./JG 77 has a large dark area under the cockpit where the Staffel's 'Zylinderhut' ('Top Hat') badge has been crudely painted out. Later, this aircraft received the customary areas of yellow to the spinner, engine cowling and rudder and remained in this finish at least until March 1941. By that time the Gruppe was based at Brest where the aircraft was photographed again (ABOVE RIGHT) with others of 5. Staffel and II. Gruppenstab. In this view, however, all machines have had their conspicuous yellow areas covered as an aid to concealment while on the ground. A photograph showing this machine with its original 'Top Hat' emblem appears in Volume One, Section 4 (Attack in the West), Page 340.



Emblem of 5./JG 77
prior to overpainting



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 'Black 3' of 5./JG 77, March 1941

This aircraft was finished in an 02/71 uppersurface camouflage with the Blue 65 fuselage sides carefully oversprayed with a light coat of 02 and darker mottles of 71. In August 1940 the aircraft was painted with the large 'Top Hat' emblem shown in the detail but this was later painted out and yellow added to the cowling and rudder.

The well-weathered Bf 109 E-7 in the background of this photograph shows the aircraft flown by Hptm. Josef Priller, the Gruppenkommandeur of III./JG 26, in early 1941, at which time the wavy III. Gruppe symbol aft of the fuselage Balkenkreuz began to be replaced by a vertical bar. Note the application of worn 02 to the fuselage sides and the accumulated general wear and tear which gives the machine a very dirty appearance. The pilot in the foreground is Oblt. Walter Horten, the Geschwader technical officer, who claimed seven victories while flying with the Stab/JG 26 before taking up a position with the Jägerstab at the RLM in May 1941. With his brother Reimar, Walter Horten was responsible for a number of flying wing designs including the Ho IX, later developed into the jet-powered Gotha Go 229.



January 1941

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4, 'White 5' of 4./JG 52, late 1940/early 1941

Displaying a generally clean appearance, 'White 5' was finished in a high-demarkation 02/71 scheme with the 71 extended to the leading edge of the fin and light, random 02 mottling. The JG 52 winged sword emblem was carried beneath the windscreen and was accompanied by the red cat emblem of 4. Staffel. The spinner was Green 70 and the cowlings and rudder have received the familiar yellow finish of the late Battle of Britain period.



Winged sword
badge of JG 52



Red cat
emblem of
4./JG 52

RIGHT AND BELOW: Aircraft of 4./JG 52 displaying the Geschwader emblem and the red cat badge of 4. Staffel. The sword and shield emblem of JG 52 was introduced at the end of 1940 or early 1941 by the Kommodore, Major Hanns Trübenbach, in honour of his predecessor, Major Hubertus Merhart von Bernegg, who came from Böblingen in Württemberg and which had as its crest the same red and black shield. Because of the superimposed winged sword, the Geschwader was sometimes known as the 'Schwert' or 'Sword' Geschwader. The pilot shown in both photographs below is Uffz. Walter Köhne.



BELOW: Although photographed at the same time and location as 'White 5', this aircraft lacks the Staffel's red cat emblem and has a noticeably different camouflage, the Blue 65 fuselage sides being mottled in RLM Grey 02 and dark green.



January 1941



LEFT: Photographed at Dinan in France, this Bf 109 is believed to have belonged to Oblt. Wolfdieter Huy's 7./JG 77 which, in November, was the first Staffel of III. Gruppe to be based in Brittany and soon started Jabo operations against England. The aircraft's yellow cowling is standing to the left of the machine.



ABOVE: Lt. Heinz Lange of 8./JG 54 at Haamstede, shortly before the unit moved to Le Mans in mid-January 1941. Lange made his first claim on 30 October 1939, was awarded the Ritterkreuz on 18 November 1944, and ended the war as Kommodore of JG 51.



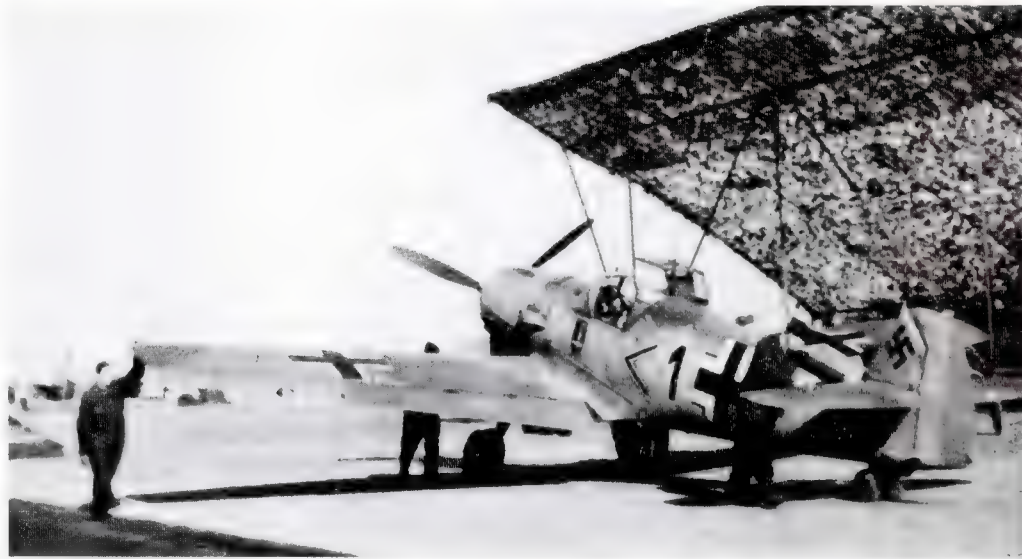
ABOVE: Two pilots of 3./JG 54 photographed at Groningen. On the left is Lt. Otto Vinzent, later killed in Russia, with Uffz. Baumgarten. In contrast to the garish schemes JG 54 was applying to its aircraft at this time, the camouflage on the fuselage of this machine is remarkably simple and consists only of a light mottle. The Staffel's 'Huntsman' emblem was based on a character from a children's book.

RIGHT: Oblt. Wolfdieter Huy, the Staffelführer of 7./JG 77, examines the engine of his aircraft together with one of the unit's mechanics. This photograph, taken at Cherbourg at the beginning of 1941, shows the new III. Gruppe emblem - the 'Wolfskopf' - which was introduced by the Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm. Alexander von Winterfeldt and was based on his family crest. Huy later became famous in the Balkans and North Africa as a Jaboflieger and was awarded the Ritterkreuz for his exploits.



February 1941

RIGHT: An interestingly marked Bf 109 E-4 of JG 52. In addition to the yellow cowling, note that only the rear half of the rudder has been painted yellow. The use of numerals in addition to Stab markings was a feature often seen on Luftwaffe fighter aircraft and most frequently on the machines of JG 52. This combination of number and symbol is believed to have been employed by units which applied a single chevron to indicate a Stab aircraft rather than the adjutant's machine.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 of JG 52

This Bf 109 E-4, '<1+' of JG 52 exhibited some interesting markings. The aircraft was finished in an 02/71 camouflage with what appears to be a light mottling of 02 on the fuselage sides. The cowling, probably also the spinner and the rear half of the rudder, was painted yellow. While the black chevron was thinly outlined in white with a further black edging, the number '1' has no border. The JG 52 emblem beneath the windscreen is a silver and black winged sword superimposed on a black and red shield. A rear-view mirror was fitted to the top of the windscreen framework.



ABOVE: On 9 February, JG 26 departed for its home bases in the Rhineland to rest. Here one of the unit's aircraft taxis on the snow-covered airfield at Bonn-Hangelar.



ABOVE: Bf 109 Es of the Erg.St.JG 27, at Oldenburg, January/February 1941. All aircraft have white noses with, as was the custom with some elements of JG 27, the individual aircraft identification number painted on the cowling.

February 1941



The 7./JG 2 was a Jabo Staffel led in October-November 1940 by Hptm. Armin Ettling. In early 1941, the newly commissioned Oblt. Werner Machold became Staffelkapitän and in this photograph, (ABOVE) taken during the Winter of 1940/1941, his 'White 1' is being prepared for a mission over England. (RIGHT) Werner Machold, assisted by a member of his ground staff, preparing for another sortie. Note the man filming.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 flown by Ritterkreuzträger Oblt. Werner Machold, Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 2, Winter of 1940/41

Oblt. Machold's normal machine was the 'White 1' shown here with an 02/71 finish which showed evidence of a previous identity marking having been sprayed over. As noted elsewhere, when Machold was shot down and became a PoW he was flying another aircraft and the RAF Crash Report makes no mention of any scoreboard decorating the tail. Machold claimed this was the first bombing attack he had carried out against shipping, having strenuously resisted such operations which he regarded as a "prostitution" of his skills as a fighter pilot.



LEFT AND RIGHT: At the time of these photographs, Machold's aircraft had 26 victory tabs on its rudder. While flying a coastal reconnaissance and anti-shipping sortie with three other aircraft on 9 June 1941, Oblt. Machold crash-landed in England and was taken prisoner. On that occasion he was, however, flying a different aircraft, coded '15', which had no victory tally marked on the rudder. Interestingly, although normally reliable post-war sources credit Machold with 32 victories, when shot down, he informed his interrogators that he had 26. Possibly he was then still awaiting the balance to be officially confirmed.



February 1941

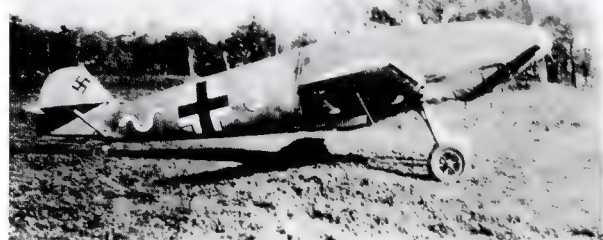
BELOW: In December 1940, I. and II./JG 51 moved to Mannheim-Sandhofen in Germany to rest. Early in the new year, JG 51 began adorning its aircraft with the new buzzard's head emblem, an example of which may be seen on this yellow-nosed Bf 109 E, believed to have been flown by 1. Staffel, in February 1941.



ABOVE: On 7 February 1941, 7./JG 26, known as the 'Red Hearts' Staffel on account of its emblem, moved to Sicily to provide escort for the Ju 87, Ju 88, He 111 and Bf 110 units fighting for air supremacy over Malta. Here, Oblt. Joachim Müncheberg, left, greets Lt. Johannes Naumann of 9./JG 26 who, at the time of this photograph, taken shortly before the 7. Staffel moved to Sicily, had two victories but would later be awarded the Ritterkreuz.



ABOVE AND BELOW: This Bf 109 E, 'White 1' of 4./JG 52 at Maldegem, February-March 1941, is believed to have been the aircraft flown by Oblt. Johannes Steinhoff.



ABOVE: 'White 3' of 7./JG 2 with engine and canopy covered as protection against the weather. The aircraft has yellow wingtips and tail.

February 1941



In early February 1941, JG 51 returned to the Channel Front. It was planned that the complete Geschwader should by then have been equipped with the Bf 109 F, but by that time only III. Gruppe had received a few examples. This photograph (*TOP LEFT*) shows one of JG 51's last 'Emils' before the Geschwader gradually converted to the 'Friedrich' during March and April, pilots of the Geschwader being sent back to Germany to collect their new machines. This unknown Oberleutnant of I./JG 51 was photographed (*LEFT AND BELOW*), with his new 'Friedrich' on the Channel Front, probably at Coquelles. Note that the Gruppe's 'Gemsbock', or 'Aiblingen Gams', emblem is still unfinished, only the blue and white background colours having been applied when these photographs were taken.



February 1941



Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 'Black 2' of I./JG 51, April 1941

This newly delivered Bf 109 F-2 has a spinner in Green 70 with a one-third white segment and is finished in a 71/02/65 scheme with only a light fuselage mottle. This scheme was soon to be replaced with the colours 74/75/76 and the yellow on the cowlings confined to a smaller area only under the nose. On this machine, final details have still to be added to the 'Gemsbock' badge of I./JG 51 beneath the cockpit.



March 1941



The III./JG 53 re-equipped with Bf 109 F-2s at Mannheim-Sandhofen in mid-March. This machine (*ABOVE*) was flown by Hptm. Wolf-Dietrich Wilke, Kommandeur of III./JG 53, and has his initials painted below the windscreen. It was photographed at Berck-sur-Mer soon after the Gruppe returned to the Channel Front. The view (*RIGHT*) shows the rudder of Wilke's machine marked with his 12 victories. Standing by Wilke's machine is Oblt. Friedrich-Karl Müller, who scored the first of his 140 victories, a Spitfire, on 29 April 1941.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 flown by Hptm. Wolf-Dietrich Wilke, Kommandeur of III./JG 53, March 1941

This aircraft was finished in the standard 02/71/65 camouflage with the addition of an all-yellow nose and rudder. The Stab symbols are those of the Kommandeur and the vertical bar aft of the Balkenkreuz was the newly introduced symbol for III. Gruppe. Personal markings include the 12 white victory tabs on the rudder and the small 'Ww' motif under the windscreen which represented the pilot's initials. The spinner backplate and the canopy framing were both finished in 70.



RIGHT: Another of III./JG 53's Bf 109 F-2s, photographed at the end of March 1941

March 1941

RIGHT: Oblt. Otto Böhner, the Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 53 with his Bf 109 F-2, W.Nr. 8100. Photographed at the end of March 1941, Böhner's machine is marked with only four victories despite the fact that at this time he had claimed five. He scored his sixth on 20 April.

BELOW: Believed photographed at Mannheim-Sandhofen, this early Bf 109 F of JG 53 was probably one of the first damaged by this Geschwader. Note the early intake which differed from later types in being smaller in diameter.



BELOW: A busy scene in March-April 1941 with mechanics working on the engines of a number of Bf 109 F-2s of the Stab and I./JG 53. On the left of the picture, the aircraft with the Stab markings was a reserve machine flown by the Kommodore of JG 53, Major Günther von Maltzahn. All Stab markings were in black with a white outline, and to indicate this aircraft's reserve status there is a small number '2' (just visible) in the chevron instead of the usual inner triangle.



The *Ergänzungsgruppen*

Before the beginning of the Second World War, aspiring fighter pilots were transferred first from the FFS (*Flugzeugführerschulen* or Pilot Training Schools) to the JFS (*Jagdfliegerschulen* or Fighter Training Schools) where they underwent combat training. From there they were assigned directly to a *Jagdgeschwader* but served first in one of its attached *Schulstaffeln* (Training Squadrons).

In wartime, however, it was decided to end this practice in order to allow the front line *Geschwader* to function more efficiently as combat units and, during February 1940, the various *Schulstaffeln* were combined to form a single unit known as *Ergänzungsjagdgruppe Merseburg*:

Newly formed			<i>Stab/Erg. JGr. Merseburg</i>
<i>Ergänzungsjagdstaffel 1</i>	Döberitz	became	1./Erg. JGr. Merseburg
<i>Ergänzungsjagdstaffel 2</i>	Merseburg	became	2./Erg. JGr. Merseburg
<i>Ergänzungsjagdstaffel 3</i>	Herzogenaurach	became	3./Erg. JGr. Merseburg
<i>Ergänzungsjagdstaffel 4</i>	Fürstenfeldbruck	became	4./Erg. JGr. Merseburg

The problem, however, with this single *Gruppe* was that it lacked flexibility and, being distanced from front line units, was unable to properly inform the pupil of current combat techniques. Therefore, in October 1940, it was decided to dissolve *Erg. JGr. Merseburg* and enlarge and re-assign its *Staffeln* to each operational *Jagdgeschwader*.

Later, the increasing demand for fighter pilots coupled with the high attrition rate suffered during the Summer of 1940, led the *Luftwaffe* leadership to increase each *Ergänzungsstaffel* to *Gruppe* strength. Each new *Gruppe* comprised a *Stab*, a 1. *Einsatzstaffel* (Operational Training Squadron) and a slightly larger 2. *Schulstaffel* (Training Squadron) with a greater complement of aircraft and personnel. Instructors and replacement aircraft were transferred from the parent *Geschwader* but each *Ergänzungsgruppe* came directly under the jurisdiction of the *General der Jagdflieger* who ensured that the necessary standards were maintained. The expansion of the units to *Gruppe* strength began during the early Spring of 1941, the *Einsatzstaffeln* of the *Ergänzungsgruppen* of JG 3, JG 27, JG 51, JG 52, JG 53, JG 54 and JG 77 all supporting the invasion of the Soviet Union in June.

The role of the *Schulstaffel* was to train novice pilots who would be able to draw on the experiences of the combat pilots assigned as instructors. The trainees would then graduate to the *Einsatzstaffel* where they would gain actual combat experience in quiet sectors of the front. The *Einsatzstaffeln* were also employed to provide fighter protection for important installations. In reality, however, the demand for pilots in the front line units was so great that pilots were sent directly to a *Jagdgeschwader* after only a few weeks in the *Schulstaffel* and it frequently became necessary to use the *Einsatzstaffeln* for purely training purposes in order to satisfy the monthly quota of fully trained fighter pilots.

The advantage of using experienced combat pilots for the final stages of training was that their unique front line experience could be passed directly on to the new recruits. The disadvantage was that the skilled fighter pilots being employed as instructors were badly needed by the front line units. In the long term, this was a burden to the front line *Geschwader* personnel which, in turn, had a negative effect on new pilots.

Training consisted of low-altitude flying and practice in aerial combat in *Schwarm* and *Rotte* formation. Aerial gunnery using ground targets as well as formation flying and tactics were also practiced. Theoretical instruction consisted of aircraft recognition and aerial tactics.

As mentioned above, all *Ergänzungsgruppen* were used occasionally also for coastal and area defence as follows:

- Erg.Gr. JG 2** Coastal defence along the Channel and later along the Bay of Biscay.
- Erg.Gr. JG 3** Defence against British incursions over the Dutch and Danish coast.
- Erg.Gr. JG 26** Coastal defence over Belgium.
- Erg.Gr. JG 27** Protection of civilian and military installations in the Greater Vienna area. After the late summer of 1941 the *Gruppe* saw action protecting the north German and Danish North Sea coast.



Oblt. Hubertus von Holtey, right, commanding officer of the *Ergänzungsgruppe* of JG 26, greets Oblt. Joachim Müncheberg during the latter's visit to Cognac in February 1941, possibly to arrange the transfer of pilots to his *Staffel*, shortly before Müncheberg took his 7./JG 26 to Sicily.

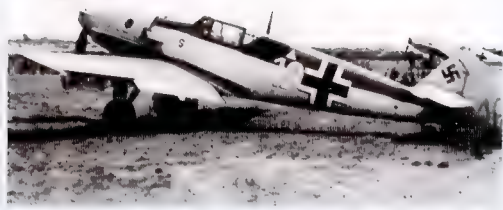
- Erg.Gr. JG 51** From early 1941, the *Gruppe* was in action against British aircraft attacking U-Boat pens on the coast of the Bay of Biscay.
- Erg.Gr. JG 52** Employed at the beginning of the Russian campaign to protect East Prussian airspace together with JG 51. Later used for coastal protection of the East Frisian islands and the Dutch coast.
- Erg.Gr. JG 53** Used to defend the French coast, the *Gruppe* was shuttled between the Channel and the Bay of Biscay.
- Erg.Gr. JG 54** During January and February 1941, missions with *Erg. St.* JG 51, to defend the U-Boat pens in the Bay of Biscay against Sunderland and Blenheim units of Coastal Command. At the start of the Russian campaign, participated in the occupation of the Baltic states.
- Erg.Gr. JG 77** Defence of Vienna area in 1941 and defence of the oilfields at Ploesti, in Rumania, 1941-42.

However, as the number of *Ergänzungsjagdgruppen* increased, the entire system became top-heavy with manpower. Control became unwieldy, and it was found that methods of training in the various *Staffeln* and *Gruppen* varied greatly. Eventually, the many individual units were again reorganised and consolidated to form three main *Ergänzungsjagdgruppen*: *Ost*, *Süd* and *West*. In this reorganisation, operational *Jagdgeschwadern* stationed in the East, for example, would receive personnel from *Ergänzungsjagdgruppe Ost* and it was therefore the location of the front line units rather than the location of the *Ergänzungsjagdgruppe* which decided its title. In this consolidation, a strength equivalent to five full-strength Fighter *Gruppen* was gained and, from part of this elements of JG 1 were formed to garrison Holland and reinforce the West.

Examples of the successive re-designations which took place are as follows:

Erg. St./JG 2	Stab/Erg.Gr. JG 2	Stab/Erg. JGr. West	Stab/JGr. West
1./Erg. Gr. JG 2	10./JG 1		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 2	1./Erg. JGr. West	1./JGr. West	
Erg. St./JG 3	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 3	Stab I./JG 3	
1./Erg. Gr. JG 3	7./JG 5		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 3	1./Erg. JGr. Süd	1./JGr. Süd	
Erg. St./JG 26	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 26	Disbanded on 27 January 1942	
1./Erg. Gr. JG 26	11./JG 1		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 26	2./Erg. JGr. West	2./JGr. West	
Erg. St./JG 27	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 27	Disbanded in January 1942	
1./Erg. Gr. JG 27	8./JG 1		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 27	2./Erg. JGr. Süd	2./JGr. Süd	
Erg. St./JG 51	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 51	Stab/Erg. JGr. Ost	Stab/JGr. Ost
1./Erg. Gr. JG 51	12./JG 1		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 51	1./Erg. JGr. Ost	1./JGr. Ost	
Erg. St./JG 52	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 52	Stab III./JG 1	
1./Erg. Gr. JG 52	9./JG 1		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 52	2./Erg. JGr. Ost	2./JGr. Ost	
Erg. St./JG 53	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 53	Stab IV./JG 1	
1./Erg. Gr. JG 53	1./JG 3		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 53	3./Erg. JGr. Süd	3./JGr. Süd	
Erg. St./JG 54	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 54	Distributed within JG 54 on 9 March 1942	
1./Erg. Gr. JG 54	Distributed within I./JG 54 on 9 March 1942		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 54	3./Erg. JGr. Ost	3./JGr. Ost	
Erg. St./JG 77	Stab/Erg. Gr. JG 77	Stab/Erg. JGr. Ost	Stab/JGr. Ost
1./Erg. Gr. JG 77	1./JG 3		
2./Erg. Gr. JG 77	4./Erg. JGr. Ost	4./JGr. Ost	
Erg. St./SchG 1	5./Erg. JGr. Ost	3./Erg. ZGr. Deblin	

LEFT AND RIGHT: 'White 12', a Bf 109 E-7 of Erg. JG 26 at Rotterdam-Waalhaven in early 1941. Erg. JG 26 was formed in September 1940 under the command of Oblt. Hubertus von Holtey and, as well as new aircraft, received reconditioned machines no longer considered suitable for operational purposes. Parent Geschwadern passing over such aircraft were encouraged to leave old markings, emblems and victory bars intact as a means of fostering among the fighter pilots under training a sense of pride in the parent unit and, for this reason, this machine retains the Geschwader's 'Schlageter' shield.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 of Ergänzungsstaffel JG 26

Fitted with the later-style canopy and a supplemental armoured windscreen, this aircraft is believed to have been manufactured originally as an E-1 and subsequently modified to E-7 standards. It has been repainted in an upper scheme of 02/71 with the level of the undersurface 65 raised to the mid-fuselage level. The JG 26 Ergänzungsstaffel emblem appeared on the cowling and although there is a Werk Nummer visible on the fin in the photograph of this aircraft, it is unfortunately illegible.



Emblem of the
Ergänzungsstaffel
of JG 26



ABOVE: This Bf 109 E, 'Yellow 1', served with Erg. Gr. JG 2 and, in addition to a Gruppe bar aft of the fuselage cross, appears to have an additional horizontal bar in yellow below the radio mast.

BELOW: Hptm. Erich Gerlitz, Staffelkapitän of Erg. Gr. JG 27 with an aircraft of 8./JG 27, the badge of which appears below the windscreen.



RIGHT: A line-up of 1./Erg. Gr. JG 53's Bf 109 Es at St. Jean d'Angély, situated north of Bordeaux.



BELOW: As with many single-engined aircraft, the long engine cowling and relatively low position of the pilot combined to produce a blind spot immediately ahead and below. From the position of these aircraft, photographed at Krakow in Poland after a collision on 25 April 1941, it would seem that the Bf 109 E of Erg. Gr. JG 3 collided with the Ju 52 for precisely that reason. (See also the personal account by Peter Bremer on Page 353.)



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4 of 2./Erg. Gr. JG 3, Krakow, Poland, 1941
Finished in an 02/71 scheme with the Blue 65 fuselage darkened with random patches of 02 and 71, this aircraft still carries the red '7' and Gruppe bar of an earlier unit, to which has been added the dice emblem of 2./Erg. Gr. JG 3.



Dice emblem of
2./Erg. Gr. JG 3





LEFT: Once operated by I./JG 1, this Bf 109 E-4 was later transferred to a training unit at Cazaux where it was fitted with a bomb rack and used to train pilots in Jabo tactics.



Emblem of JG 1



Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4/B of an Ergänzungsgruppe, 1942

Once operated by I./JG 1, this Bf 109 E-4/B was later transferred to an Ergänzungsgruppe, possibly Erg. Gr. JG 54, at Cazaux, on the west coast of France, where it flew with a bomb rack. Fighter training units based in this area frequently practised bombing in the Gironde Estuary where there was an old wreck which served as a target. On this aircraft, the emblem of the former unit has been retained on the fuselage but, except for the lower cowlings, the earlier yellow nose has been repainted Green 71.

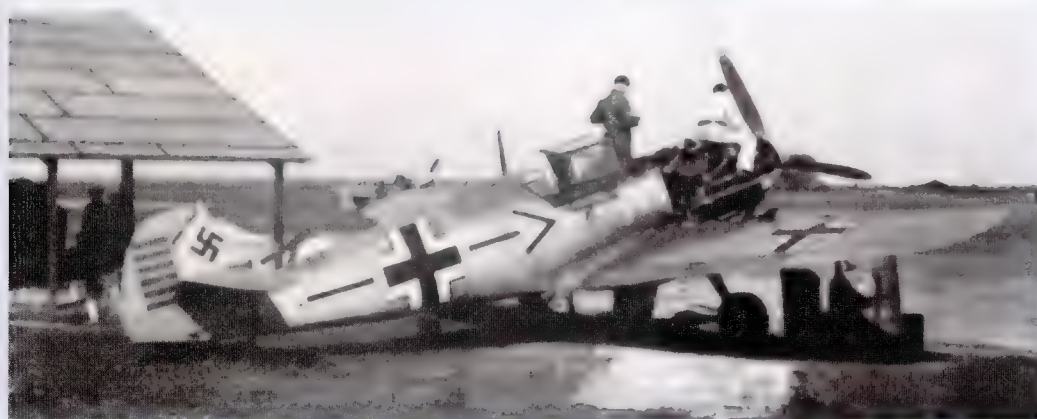
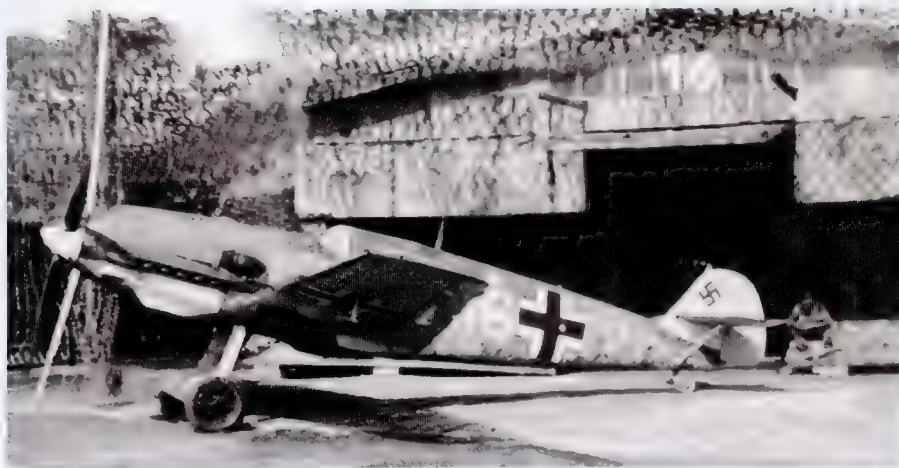


ABOVE: This Bf 109 E was obviously once on the strength of JG 2 but is seen here at a training school. Yellow stripes were normally applied to aircraft used for blind flying training but those seen on the engine cowlings of this machine were possibly added to warn other aircraft that the pilot was inexperienced and might inadvertently carry out unexpected manoeuvres. This theory is perhaps supported by the yellow on the upper and lower surfaces of the wingtips. The aircraft also has a yellow rudder and a narrow white band which completely encircled the rear fuselage.

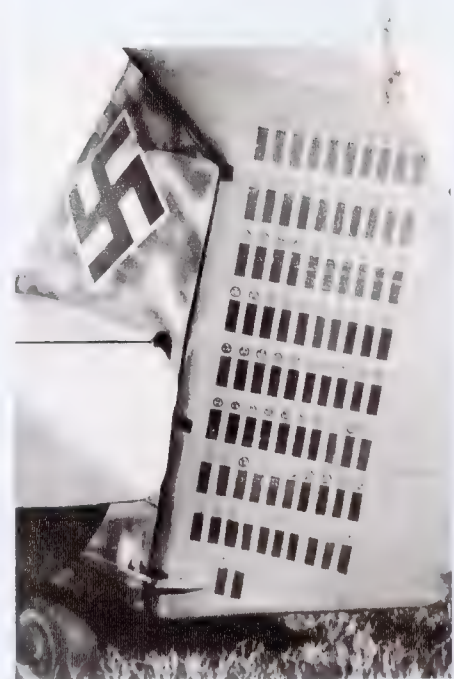
BELOW: One of Erg. Gr. JG 26's Bf 109s at Cognac, fitted with an ETC for fighter-bomber practice.



RIGHT: In September 1940, 3,000 Belgian workmen were employed by the Germans to extend Wevelgem aerodrome. The work was carried out by a local Belgian contractor under the supervision of the Organisation Todt, and pay compared very favourably with local rates. Between the end of November and mid-January, the aerodrome was unserviceable due to wet weather but the extension work was completed in mid-January and, soon afterwards, it became the base for *Ergänzungsgruppe* JG 26. Here, one of this unit's Bf 109 Es is seen parked in front of a well-camouflaged hangar. The machine's entire tail area, which seems to match the tone of the spinner and the code number '16', was probably yellow. It was customary for aircraft serving with training units to have higher numbers than operational units.



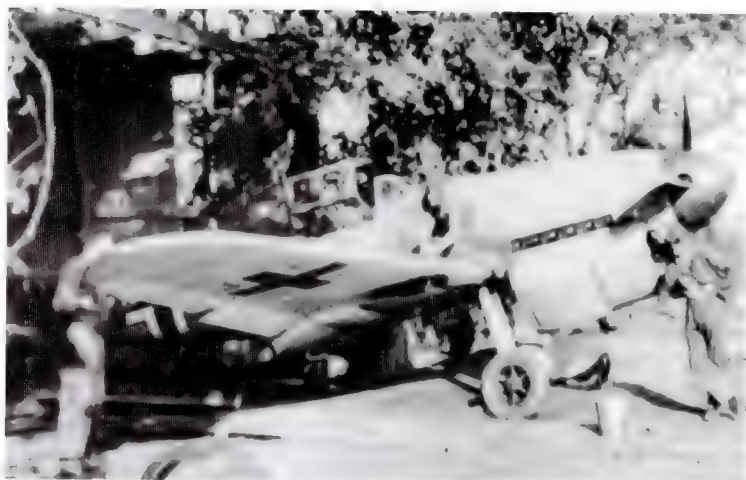
ABOVE: On 15 April 1941, *Obstlt.* Galland is believed to have shot down two, possibly three Spitfires, but did not claim the third as he did not see it crash. The two aircraft claimed were Galland's 60th and 61st victories, but why only one and not both of these victories should be marked on the tail of his Bf 109 E-7 W.Nr. 5819, seen here at Brest with 60 victory bars, is not known. The matter is all the more curious for the fact that at the time of the two kills mentioned, Galland was flying his pre-production Bf 109 F-0, W.Nr. 6714, just visible in the background.



BELOW AND RIGHT: *Obstlt.* Galland's old W.Nr. 5819 was eventually passed on to *Ergänzungsgruppe* JG 26 at Cognac where it was flown by the *Kommandeur*, *Oblt.* Hubertus von Holtey. Although the JG 26 'Schlageter' and 'Mickey Mouse' badges were retained, the machine was re-camouflaged to conceal Galland's *Kommodore* markings and, in view of von Holtey's status, a more appropriate *Gruppenkommandeur's* double chevron was applied in their place. Later, a number 16 was added aft of the fuselage *Balkenkreuz*. This photograph (**RIGHT**) shows Galland's 82 victory bars on the rudder, but by the time of the last, a *Blenheim* on 4 September 1941, Galland had long since been flying the Bf 109 F. It is not understood why the scoreboard on the rudder of W.Nr. 5819 was kept up to date, nor when this machine was eventually handed over to *Erg. Gr.* JG 26.



RIGHT: Unlike the engine cowlings on the earlier Bf 109 E which had to be completely removed for engine maintenance, those on the Bf 109 F had a central hinge which allowed each side to be raised, clamshell fashion. As seen on this machine, the lower cowlings were also hinged and swung down and to one side.



LEFT: The III./JG 2 began to receive its first Bf 109 Fs at the end of April 1941. This early example, 'White 5', was assigned to 9./JG 2 but has not yet had the Staffelwappen applied. The green spinner with a white segment is typical of the period, as is the yellow on the nose, now confined to the lower cowlings. Note also the black heat-resistant paint applied around the exhaust. The layout of the armament - two MG 17s mounted over the engine and a single MG 151 cannon firing down the propeller shaft - was considered a great improvement over that of earlier models because, being concentrated in the nose, it produced a better cone of fire. Although early cannon were not entirely satisfactory and stoppages were fairly frequent, a further improvement was that the pilot could clear a jam from the cockpit.



RIGHT: A Bf 109 F of 9./JG 2 with the Staffel badge on an all-yellow nose, photographed at St. Pol. Note the supercharger intake which was smaller on the early Fs and the 'Richthofen' badge under the cockpit.

April 1941



LEFT: Hptm. Karl-Heinz Greisert, Kommandeur of II./JG 2 at Abbeville, early 1941. The officer on the right is Lt. Günther Behrendt of 4./JG 2 who scored his first victory, a Spitfire, on 25 June 1941.

BELOW: An early Bf 109 F of I./JG 53 with ground personnel at Maldegem, April/May 1941. At this time the ground staff were still unfamiliar with their newly received machines.



LEFT: I. and II./JG 52 began to receive their first Bf 109 Fs at the beginning of May, 1941. This aircraft of 6./JG 52, photographed at Ostende, has a yellow cowling and rudder and a plain number '5' without outline. On the tail, ready to be donned quickly in the event of an Alarmstart, is the pilot's parachute. At the time this photograph was taken, the Geschwader's III. Gruppe was in the Balkans, still equipped with the 'Emil'.

RIGHT: During the Winter of 1940/41, the Luftwaffe erected more permanent structures to protect men and machines from the elements. Here, a Bf 109 F of an unidentified unit is parked in front of a wooden hangar.

BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT: The personal emblem on the nose of this Bf 109 F immediately identifies the aircraft as having once been flown by Ofw. Josef Heinzeller, although the 25 victory bars on the rudder present something of a mystery. The photographs are believed to have been taken in mid-1941, at which time the number of victories required for the Ritterkreuz was about 20. However, as Heinzeller did not achieve such a score and was not awarded the Ritterkreuz, this suggests that the aircraft was later assigned to another pilot, a Ritterkreuzträger, who retained Heinzeller's personal emblem. Unfortunately, the identity of this second pilot is not known.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 'Yellow 6' of 3./JG 2

The camouflage scheme on this aircraft consisted of 02/71 in fairly large, solid patches on the fuselage and a soft-edged splinter scheme on the upper surfaces. In accordance with instructions issued in mid-1941, only the underside of the cowlings has been painted yellow. The spinner is 70 with a one-third white segment and the rudder is marked with 25 victory bars. The white silhouette of a dog and the name 'Schnauz!' are usually associated with the aircraft flown by Ofw. Josef Heinzeller, some further examples of which may be seen on Page 241, Volume 2, Section 3.



April 1941



Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2, W.Nr. 6674, flown by Ritterkreuzträger Hptm. Heinz Bretnütz, Kommandeur of II./JG 53

This aircraft was finished in an 02/71 scheme with the entire nose painted yellow, except for a Green 71 spinner backplate. Apart from the Kommandeur's insignia on the fuselage, the machine had been further personalised with the addition of a telescope mounted on the far right of the windscreen and the name 'Peter' under the cockpit. The aircraft is shown here with 30 victory bars, the last being a Spitfire claimed south of Dungeness on 3 May 1941. Hptm. Bretnütz claimed another six victories on the Channel Front before his unit transferred east to take part in 'Barbarossa'. On the first day of the invasion, 22 June 1941, Hptm. Bretnütz claimed his 37th victory, a Russian bomber, but had to make a forced landing and was seriously wounded. He was taken to hospital where one of his legs was amputated in an attempt to save his life, but he died on 27 June.

RIGHT AND BELOW: This yellow-nosed Bf 109 F-2 W.Nr. 6674 was flown by Hptm. Bretnütz, Kommandeur of II./JG 53. Under the cockpit was the name 'Peter' in red and the pilot's victory score was recorded as red tabs on a yellow rudder. Note the telescope mounted in the windscreen.



May 1941



Mechanics working (*TOP LEFT AND ABOVE*) on one of Obstlt. Werner Mölders' Bf 109 Fs which, at the time of this photograph, was marked with 56 victory bars. A study of various photographs indicates that Mölders flew at least two Bf 109 F-2s, both marked with his victory tally. Note that in addition to subtle differences in the camouflage mottling on the machine (*LEFT*), the Kommodore's markings are smaller than on the aircraft shown (*FAR LEFT*).

Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 flown by Obstlt. Werner Mölders, Kommodore of JG 51, May 1941

On 4 May 1941, Obstlt. Mölders shot down his 65th victory, a Hurricane II of 602 Sqn. At this time, Mölders had at least two aircraft, both apparently finished in the 02/71/65 scheme and marked with similar, but not identical, Stab markings. On this aircraft, the fuselage mottle was predominantly 71 and the spinner was 70 with a one-third white segment. Mölders' 65 victory bars were marked on the yellow rudder and the aircraft also carried the newly introduced 'Buzzard's Head' emblem of JG 51 on the yellow nose.



The buzzard's head emblem of JG 51



May 1941

RIGHT: The Bf 109 F-2, W.Nr .6683, flown by Major Günther von Maltzahn, the Kommodore of JG 53, with 20 victory tabs on the yellow rudder.



Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 flown by Major Günther v. Maltzahn, Kommodore of JG 53, early 1941

This aircraft, W.Nr. 6683, was painted in the standard 02/71 colours but with the addition of large areas of yellow over the spinner, cowlings and rudder. Twenty black victory bars appear on the rudder.



ABOVE, ABOVE RIGHT AND RIGHT: 1./JG 54 was based at Langerooß/Jever in May 1941. Still retaining a few Bf 109Es, (ABOVE) the Gruppe began to re-equip with the Bf 109 F in May 1941. Seen here (RIGHT) is Fw. Georg Braunshirn in his Bf 109 F coded 'Yellow 12'.

June 1941



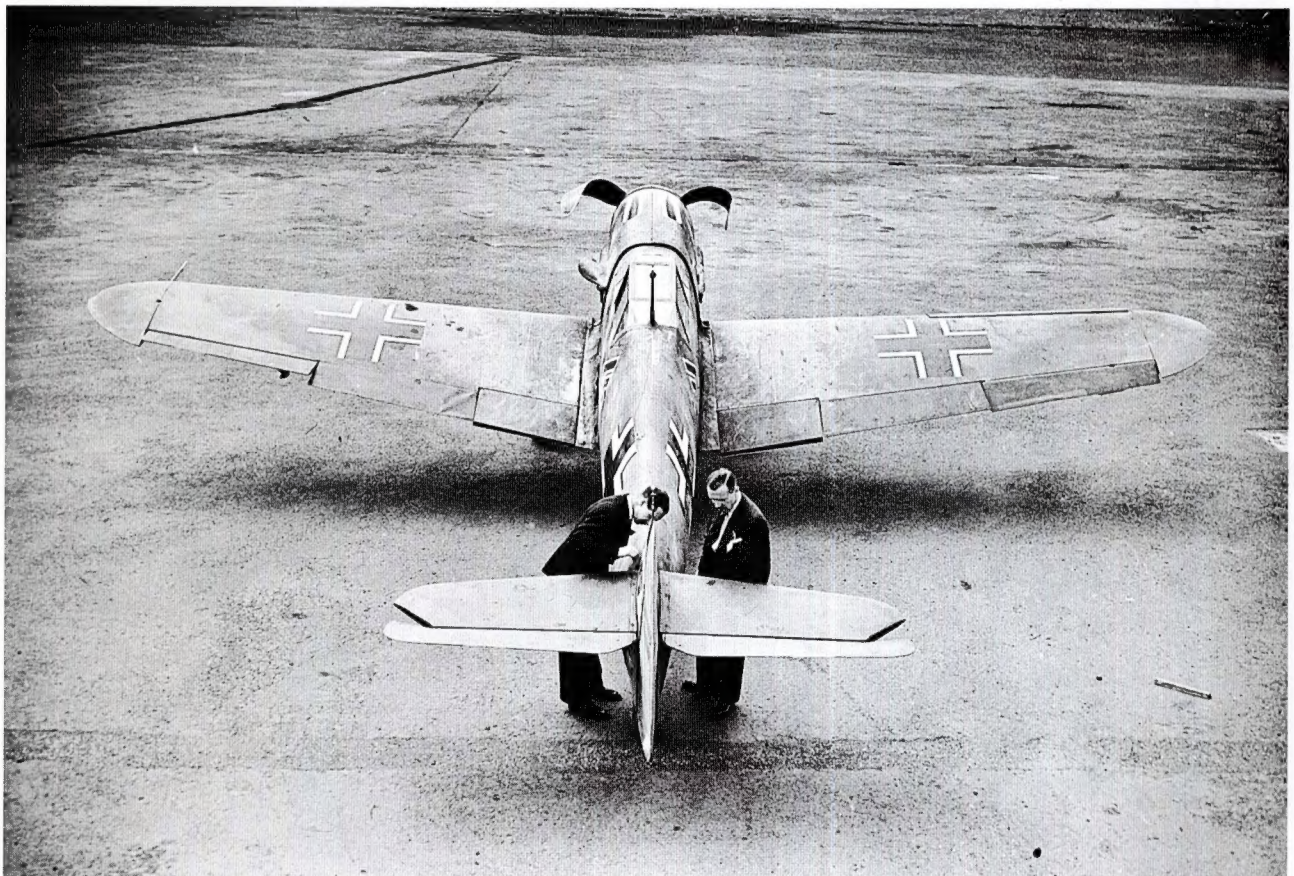
Messerschmitt Bf 109F-2, W.Nr. 12764, flown by Hauptmann Rolf Pingel, Gruppenkommandeur of I./JG 26, 10 July 1941

The RAF Crash Report on this aircraft describes the camouflage as a "dark olive green", and although the uppersurfaces were in fact finished in the then standard 02 and 71, the Green 71 predominated and was accentuated by the dense but soft-edged mottles of 71. Weathering was minimal, the aircraft having been flown for only two days before it was brought down. The spinner was 70 with a white segment and the yellow rudder was marked with red victory bars. Although not mentioned in any reports, photographs suggest that the MG troughs on the cowlings were yellow.



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: Hptm. Rolf Peter Pingel's Bf 109 F-2, W. Nr. 12764, following its forced landing beside the Deal to Dover road on 10 July 1941. As he landed, Pingel saw some Hurricanes escorting a Lysander which all circled him and then flew away. The aircraft was captured intact owing to the prompt action of an Army detachment which, observing Pingel had climbed from his aircraft, deterred him from setting fire to it with a burst of machine-gun fire aimed above his head. The aircraft, which had only been flown for two days before it fell into British hands, had been fitted with a 20 mm MG 151 at Pingel's special request. The machine was later taken for examination to Farnborough where it was repaired and test flown. Both aircraft and pilot were prize captures, the aircraft being the first intact example of a Bf 109 F to be acquired by the British, while Hptm. Pingel was a first-rate officer with 22 victories, a holder of the Knight's Cross and Gruppenkommandeur of I./JG 26.





RLM Greys and the Bf 109 F

A thorough examination of the photographs of *Hptm.* Pingel's Bf 109 F-2, captured in early July 1941, gives every indication that, as with the earlier Bf 109 E-4 and E-7 models, it was finished in an RLM 02/71/65 camouflage. Described in the Preliminary Site Report on Pingel's aircraft as "dark olive green", this scheme is reported also to have been applied to all F-0 and F-1 variants as well as aircraft in the early production F-2 series.

On 24 June 1941, however, the RLM had issued an order which officially approved the changeover to a new day fighter scheme incorporating the colours 74 and 75 over 76. Soon afterwards, on 15 August, Messerschmitt AG issued a painting guide, *Oberflächenschutzliste 8 Os 109 F u g*, which particularly applied to the Bf 109 F and the early Bf 109 G series. This guide specified that colours 74 and 75 were to be applied to the upper surfaces in approximately equal areas with a soft demarcation between them, while the sides of the fuselage, fin and rudder assemblies and all undersurfaces were to be finished in RLM 76. Fuselage mottling was to be applied softly to each side of the fuselage and fin and rudder assembly in approximately equal amounts of colours 02, 70 and 74. Messerschmitt AG's guide also specified that the spinner was to be painted in three colours, with the main body finished in RLM 70, a one-third segment in white and the forward, nose section in 76. However, as is clear from photographs, few service machines had the 76 cap.

In view of the variety of finishes which proliferated during the Battle of Britain, the RLM order was clearly intended to standardize the camouflage finish on German fighters and ensure that they all conformed to one general specification, eventually confirmed in November 1941 with the re-issue of L.Dv.521/1 and 2. In practice, however, no two aircraft would be identical since the fuselage finish in particular was applied freehand, i.e. without masking or stencils. Differences due to variations in the taste and skill of the painters were therefore permissible.

As a further note on colours, in June-July 1941 the German High Command issued orders that, henceforth, only the lower nose on the Bf 109 was to be painted yellow. Thus the completely yellow (or, occasionally white) cowlings which had been such a feature during the Battle of Britain gradually disappeared, but the use of the yellow undercowling remained on many types of German aircraft virtually to the end of the war. Even in the Mediterranean, where white wingtip and white fuselage theatre markings were the norm, the yellow undercowling was still widely employed.

The diagram shows the standard uppersurface pattern for the Bf 109 F.



The uppersurface scheme on *Hptm.* Pingel's aircraft conformed to the prescribed pattern and had soft-edged demarcation lines rather than the usual angular splinter pattern.

F/O JEAN HENRI MARIE OFFENBERG (BELGIAN) 145 AND 609 SQN. RAF

Jean Offenbergh was born at Laeken, in Brussels, on 3 July 1916 and after flying training, became a pilot with the 2 Group, 4/II/2 Squadron, 2nd Regiment of the *Aéronautique Militaire* flying CR.42s. On 10 May 1940, during the German invasion of Belgium, he claimed a Do 17 shot down and another damaged.

On 18 May, Offenbergh and fellow pilots withdrew to France where they were temporarily assigned to the defence of the aerodrome at Chartres and it was here that they heard King Leopold III broadcast the news of Belgium's capitulation. On 11 June, Offenbergh and three other Belgian airmen were ordered to Bordeaux-Mérignac but, learning of the pending armistice between France and Germany, Offenbergh and a friend seized two Caudron Simouns and flew them first to Corsica and then on via Phillipeville in Algeria to Oujda where other Belgians had established a flying school.

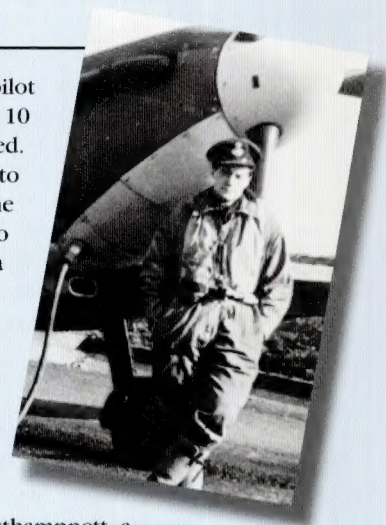
Disappointed at the low morale there, the two caught a train to Casablanca where they met other Belgians and also some Poles who had received authorisation to sail to Gibraltar. As stowaways aboard the ship *Har Zion*, the Belgians reached Gibraltar and then transferred to a British ship sailing for England. They arrived at Liverpool on 16 July.

Offenbergh was first posted to 6 OTU at Sutton Bridge and then, on 17 August, joined 145 Sqn. equipped with Hurricanes at Drem in Scotland, shortly before the squadron moved to Dyce. On 8 September, Offenbergh claimed a Do 215 damaged and on 9 October, the squadron was ordered to Westhampnett, a satellite of Tangmere on the south coast of England. He had now received the affectionate nickname 'Pyker', a corruption of 'Peike', a popular term in Belgium for a small boy born in Brussels. Offenbergh's first action with the RAF occurred over the Isle of Wight on 27 October when 145 Sqn. was involved in combat with Bf 109s. Firing on one Bf 109, 'Pyker' reported seeing it explode. Pieces flew into the air and the enemy aircraft streamed black smoke, but he was only awarded a probable. On 1 November, however, he was credited with his first confirmed Bf 109 (see Page 304) and on the 6th shared in the destruction of another. On the 9th he damaged a Ju 88 and shared an He 111 on 11 December.

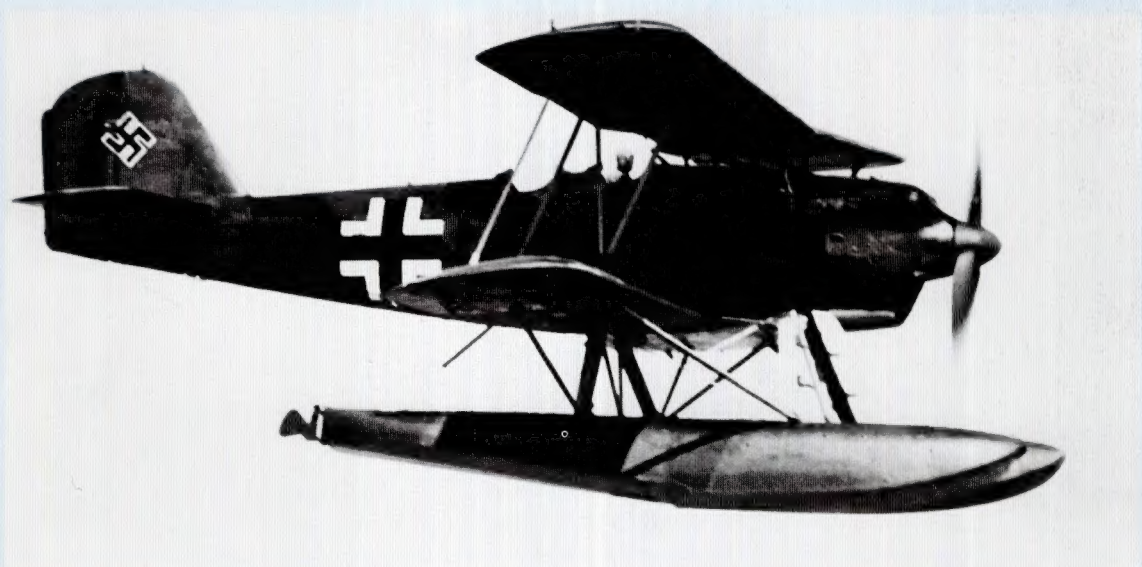
In January the squadron converted to Spitfires. At this time the RAF began offensive operations but was reluctant to allow pilots from the occupied countries to operate over France and Belgium. However, while air testing a Spitfire on 5 May 1941, 'Pyker' could not resist the temptation to explore the Channel and soon discovered two He 60s flying in single file low over the sea off Cherbourg. Attacking head on with the sun behind him, he shot down one and damaged the other before a pair of Bf 109s arrived. Although low on ammunition, he opened fire on one Bf 109 which went into shallow dive trailing white smoke. Offenbergh then made good his escape and returned to Tangmere where he expected to be reproached for his unauthorised action. Officially, he was given a polite reprimand although, unofficially, he was also congratulated for his aggressive spirit and for destroying the He 60 and Bf 109.

Offenbergh became 145 Squadron's 'B' Flight Commander on 21 May, and in June was the first Belgian to be awarded the DFC. He was posted to 609 Sqn. at Biggin Hill on 17 June and claimed a Bf 109 damaged on the 22nd and another destroyed on 7 July. On 19 July 'Pyker' Offenbergh was credited with the probable destruction of a Bf 109, was awarded the Belgian *Croix de Guerre* on 21 July and on the 27th was given command of 609 Squadron's 'B' Flight. On 30 July, he was promoted to Flying Officer and was credited with three more probables on the 6th, 27th and 29 August. He claimed a Bf 109 damaged on 27 September and another on 13 October. In November, 609 Sqn. was posted to Digby in Lincolnshire where it was employed on convoy escort duties.

Offenbergh was training a new pilot in formation flying over Digby airfield on 22 January 1942 when a Spitfire from another squadron carried out a mock attack but collided with Offenbergh's machine. The tail of Offenbergh's Spitfire was severed and both aircraft crashed from 1,000 feet, too low for either pilot to bale out. F/O 'Pyker' Offenbergh was buried with full military honours in Lincolnshire on 26 January 1941. He was credited with five confirmed victories, five probably destroyed, two shared and seven damaged.



On 5 May 1941, F/O Jean Offenbergh of 145 Squadron attacked two He 60 seaplanes over the Channel and claimed one destroyed and one damaged. Both belonged to 2./Seenotgruppe, the machine destroyed being flown by Ofw. Paul Stockinger, who was wounded. The observer, Oblt. Hans Hilboig, was killed. In this engagement, Offenbergh was also credited with the destruction of one of two Bf 109s which appeared on the scene.



FLT/LT. VICTOR ORTMANS (BELGIAN) 229 & 609 SQN. RAF

Victor Ortmans was born in London on 17 April 1915 of Belgian refugees who fled the Liège area when German troops entered the area. At the end of the First World War, the Ortmans returned to Belgium where 'Vicky', as he was known, later enlisted in the *Aéronautique Militaire*. He trained as a pilot in 1938 and joined the 7/III/3 'Flèche Ailée', or 'Winged Arrow' reconnaissance squadron, then based at Evre and equipped with obsolescent Fairey Fox biplanes. Ortmans was already well known for his flying stunts and sense of humour which seemed to be exaggerated when nourished with alcohol. Nevertheless, he was a skilled pilot and when Belgium was again invaded in May 1940, he flew daring missions despite *Luftwaffe* superiority.

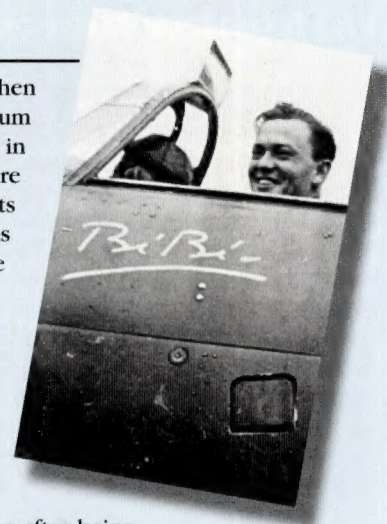
By 16 May, almost all Belgian Air Force units had escaped to France, but following the French capitulation on 18 June, Ortmans embarked on the SS *Apapa* and sailed to Britain. With Ortmans were a number of other experienced Belgian pilots including Albert van den Hove, Georges Doutrepoint and Rudolphe de Hemricourt, all of whom were immediately accepted by the RAF and, after an accelerated training course with 7 OTU at Hawarden, posted to different squadrons. At the beginning of August 1940, P/O Ortmans was sent to 229 Sqn. On his first flight, he tried to demonstrate his flying ability by rolling his aircraft onto its back and flying inverted but succeeded only in incurring the wrath of his commanding officer. His ego was further dented on 30 August when he had to forced land his Hurricane after being hit by return fire from a Do 17, but on 15 September he claimed his revenge when he shared in the destruction of another Do 17. On 27 September he was credited with one He 111 destroyed and another damaged, and on the 30th, in a particularly hard-fought battle, he claimed a Do 17 destroyed and a Bf 109 as probably destroyed but had to crash-land his Hurricane on the beach at Folkestone. His final claim for 1940 was a Ju 88 damaged on 18 October.

In April 1941, after training on Spitfires, Ortmans was posted to 609 Sqn. where he was reunited with some of his countrymen and, as a member of 609 Squadron's Belgian Flight, flew sorties first over the Channel and English mainland and then took part in bomber escort missions and fighter sweeps. Within five months, in which time he was promoted to Flying Officer and awarded the Belgian *Croix de Guerre* and DFC, Ortmans was credited with another four Bf 109s destroyed plus five damaged. He was also shot down twice into the Channel, once on 19 August, when he was rescued by an ASR launch, and again on 27 September, when he was picked up from the sea by the same launch.

Ortmans' luck ran out on 21 October 1941. In an engagement over Boulogne Harbour, he destroyed two enemy aircraft but was himself shot down into the sea during combat with JG 26. He spent two days and a night in his dinghy before being rescued by a German *Seenotboot* and transferred to *Stalag Luft III* where he remained until the end of the war.

Victor's younger brother Christian was also a member of 609 Sqn, having been among a later batch of escapees. Believing at first that Victor had been killed, Christian painted the name 'Vicky' on his aircraft in memory of his brother. Christian later went to the Far East with 615 Sqn., but on 1 April 1943, he was shot down over the jungle. Although he succeeded in baling out, tragically, Christian Ortmans was later found still hanging in his parachute, apparently shot dead by Anzac troops who had mistaken him for a Japanese pilot.

Liberated in 1945, Flt/Lt. Victor Ortmans soon joined 349 (Belgian) Squadron, then based in occupied Germany. However, his earlier, carefree spirit was broken. The long years of captivity, the death of his brother and the feeling of having missed out on the action of the latter war years, all culminated in an overwhelming sense of loss. He turned to drink, because of which he soon had to leave the air force, and joined Sabena, the Belgian national airline, which at that time was seeking experienced pilots, but he had to leave that organisation also. He then flew light aircraft at air shows and meetings, but on 12 August 1950, he was killed in a flying accident during a display at Schaffen airfield. Thus Victor Ortmans, one of the best-known Belgian aces, met an airman's death. Perhaps that was what he secretly wished.



LEFT: Major Wilhelm Balthasar, Kommodore of JG 2 'Richthofen', in the cockpit of his Bf 109 F-2. As regards popularity and firing the imagination of fighter pilots, Balthasar was considered comparable with Mölders. He was killed on 3 July 1941 when he had 40 victories and seems to have fallen victim to the structural weakness of the early Bf 109 F when one of his aircraft's wings collapsed. At the time, however, he was engaged in combat with P/O Victor Ortmans of 609 Sqn. who was subsequently credited with one Bf 109 damaged on this date, and it is therefore possible that this damage contributed to the collapse of Balthasar's wing.